



Kate Kretz, *How to Act, Not React, When He Makes You Crazy*, p. 52, 1996-97, oil on canvas, 36" x 62" (photo courtesy of the artist).

Home is the title of one of Robert Walden's wall pieces, which consist of city maps carefully cut apart to leave a spidery configuration of streets and nothing else. Home in this instance is both a literal site one can potentially locate in the intersection of roads and an abstract entity delicately suspended within a network of cultural configurations. The sheer fragility of Walden's work jarringly juxtaposes with Linda Armstrong's cumbersome and claustrophobic installation, *Loon*, clearly the most ecologically oriented work in the show. Consisting of Tibetan prayer flags, stuffed birds, deflated balloons and strands of rubber tubing evocative of beach debris, and featuring a soundtrack by Dick Robinson, *Loon* recreates a tragic environment where nature loses out to industrial waste.

While some of the work is easily forgettable, offering eye candy and little more, most of the 18 artists represented in this show leave a lasting impression on the viewer. But in either case, kudos to all of these artists for exploring the creative potential of materials hastily discarded by the rest of us.

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To enter the garish Technicolor environment created by this exhibition of paintings by Miami artist **KATE KRETZ**, "*Fate of A Technicolor Romantic*" (*Hollywood Art and Culture Center, April 27—June 25*), is to enter a world of disillusion, loss, and dreams forsaken. It is a claustrophobic world of tilted perspectives and close encounters that is personal and disturbing, but not without hope. It is also a world tinged with irony, fate, and a sense of humor and positive idealism that

elevates its cast of characters (many of them self-portraits) above the mundane nature of the imagery. There is an intellectual content that informs each work and provides the context for her soul-searching commentary on life's travails and dispels any maudlin overtones. Each work is self-referential, inspired by Kretz' own experiences, and a study in appearances. Each work is also about painting and its formal elements and how technique, color, lighting and composition can transform an ordinary face or scene into something quite unexpected.

Recounting how she was raised on a regimen of Catholicism and Technicolor movies, Kretz describes how their common lurid and resplendent light was impressed upon her visual memory, while their internal ideals wove a seemingly impenetrable fabric of faith, magic, romance, justice, and universal goodness. Her paintings question notions of reality and spirituality and all the unresolved tensions that lie beneath a value system that is not really secure and full of illusions. As a woman, she brings her own quest for truth amidst the sensory bombardment that is life today. From television to magazines to the dating scene, it is all there in claustrophobic paintings, drawings, books and objects.

The exhibition presents a retrospective of her works beginning with the "Beauty Wrest Series" (1994-97) in which she first addresses women's confrontation with truth and reality as a universal phenomenon of frustration and anxiety. Appropriating magazine cover "come-ons" as titles, such as *How to Act, Not React, When He Makes You Crazy*, p. 52, and *I Let Him, But I Didn't Really Like It...* straight from *Cosmopolitan*, Kretz deals with the dynamics of male/female relationships by setting up her imagery as figurative still-lives. Playing upon dramatic lighting with tawdry colors and insipid tonalities, even her compositions are manipulated in such a way as to provoke unease and emotional distress.

Another, the "Vigil Series" (1997-2000), continues to explore issues of emotional distress, now with one-word titles that denote power and command and refer more to the loss of a belief system that goes beyond references to ritual to encompass questions of self-esteem. These works, done in different media, are more direct and confrontational and demand more of the viewer. Reflecting the concept of control not only in her painting technique, Kretz works with dramatic lighting effects, some created by candles, and up-close portraits (including self-portraits), and also uses hands in remarkably expressive ways to further emphasize the imperative nature of the works and affect viewers' response.

The title work of the exhibition, *Fate of a Technicolor Romantic*, is Kretz' most recent painting. A large compendium of her concerns about life's travails, issues of class and identity, consumerism and society, it includes an inventory of her life's possessions and influences, ideas that have evolved into personal metaphors. Night light and its gaudy effects accentuated by the scene from *The Sound of Music* glowing on the television screen challenge the reading of someone else's trash as distinct from that of our own.

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