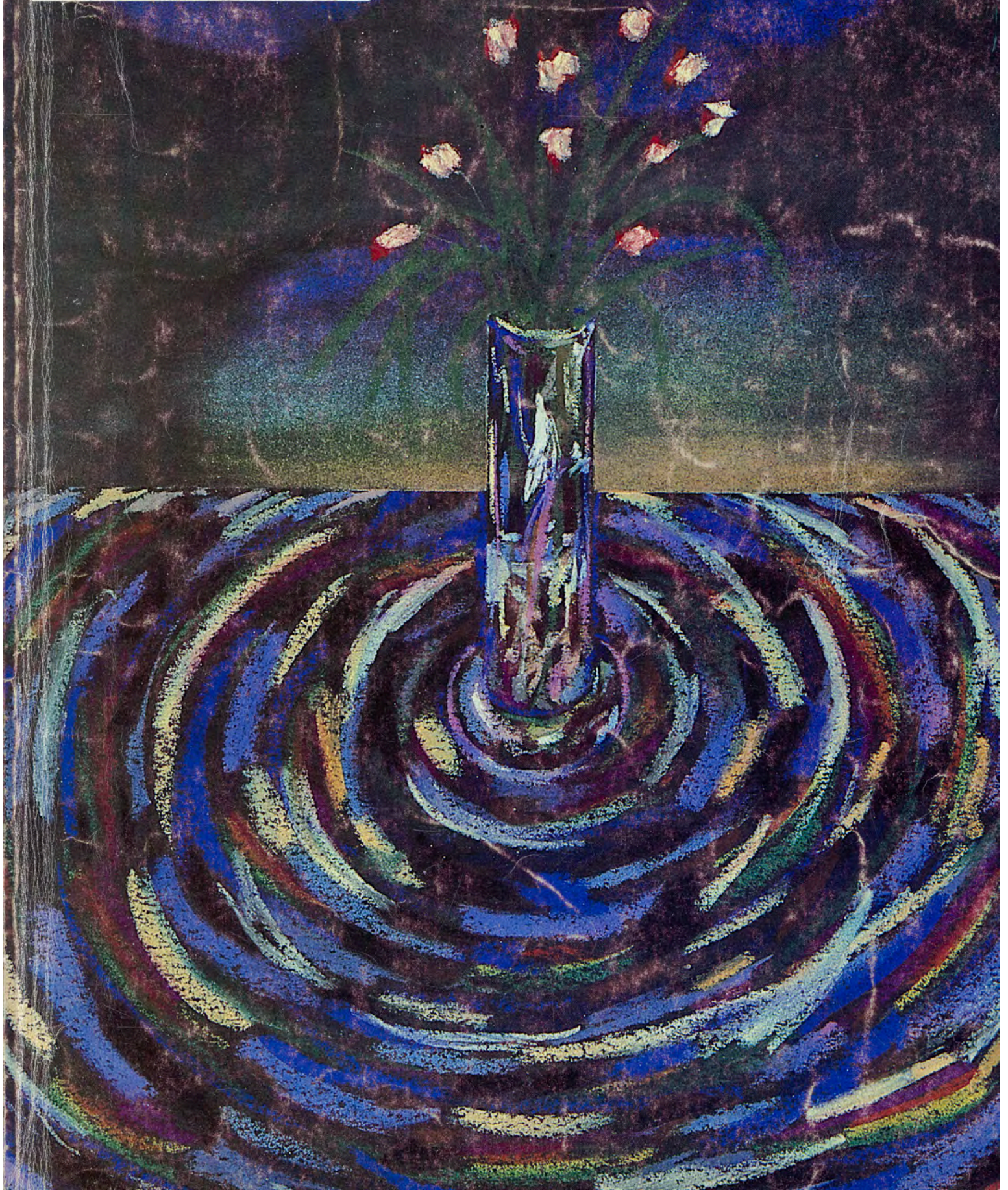


arts

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The current interest in figurative painting has brought a wide variety of new artists to the public eye. One of the most unusual of these is Marcia Grostein, a Brazilian-born artist. Grostein's work is very much in the expressionist tradition; her paintings sometimes evoke comparison with such contemporary European painters as Enzo Cucchi and Walter Dahn. But whereas the European expressionists tend to be involved with the psychological aspects of their work, Grostein's aesthetic is instead anti-intellectual. Her paintings are expressionistic in the pure sense of the term, and what they express is joy, sensuality, the luxuriousness of the human body.

I asked Grostein about the relationship of her work to that of the contemporary European painters. As it turned out, she had attended the recent Zeitgeist exhibition in Berlin where many of the new European artists were shown. Grostein came away with this reaction: "I don't believe in

MARCIA GROSTEIN

Marcia Grostein, Untitled, 1983. Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 73". Courtesy Betty Parsons Gallery.

the European expressionism. Those painters, especially the Germans, are really too young to have experienced that anxiety, those traumas. I think they are too immature for that subject matter. So I left thinking that I wanted to choose a light subject. I didn't want to pretend like that."

The light subject as a matter of choice has become a trademark in Grostein's work. Indeed, her paintings are remarkable for their deft touch, for their charm, humor, and vitality. She works in acrylics, using swirls of brightness to highlight a palette in which grays and whites predominate. Her images, which in the past have ranged all the way from elephant heads to disembodied suits of clothing, now tend to female figures in motion. The viewer finds great, billowing, fleshy forms, figures that fascinate and delight. There is some of the same feeling here that one gets in Chagall (the warmth and accessibility, although not the intense nostalgia) and there is

the same fluid line and sensuality that one finds in Matisse. This latter similarity is not accidental, for when I questioned Grostein about painters whose work has had an impact on her own, she mentioned Matisse along with de Kooning and Francis Bacon.

The sense of freedom in Grostein's paintings, together with her preoccupation with the human figure in motion, is also no accident. At one time, Grostein trained extensively in ballet, both in Brazil and Europe, and in some ways dance remains her first love. "All my paintings are about dance," she says, "all my paintings are dancing." In keeping with this feeling of freedom, Grostein refuses to title her work. She believes that a title limits the viewer's response to a painting. It suggests a category and imposes a preconception. The artist would prefer viewers to work with their feelings in the same way that she has done in creating the painting. "Art is a fantasy, a pleasure," she explains. "You must experience your feelings. I want the viewer to use the imagination. I don't want to limit that."

To say that art is fantasy, however, is not necessarily to abandon discipline. Grostein is very concerned with the technical aspects of her work, and her painting has graceful draftsmanship and self-assured brushwork to go along with the engaging subject matter. The painterliness of her canvases is interesting in and of itself. But technique is used to a purpose rather than to an end, and the work is never dry or academic. What one finds most in Grostein's art is exhilaration.

Here is a painter whose work is thoughtful without being overly intellectual, whose approach is deliberate without being overly analytical. Here is a figurative artist whose art is not "mannerist," an expressionist with something to express beyond anxiety and anguish. Grostein is not unknown in the New York art world (her work has appeared at the Sutton Gallery, as well as at P.S. 1 and in the recent Women of the Americas exhibition), but she has yet to receive the attention she deserves. This show should go a long way toward correcting that. (Betty Parsons, April 9-27)

George Bradley

