

Oursler, *Hole*, 1998,  
oil on canvas, 27 x 22 x 36"



Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 1998,  
acrylic on canvas, 66 x 72"



Dotty Attie,  
1998,

say, Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work.

Oursler might reply to these criticisms by saying he was being ironic; if so, I missed the irony (and liked the seriousness). The temporality of video is peculiarly well suited to the fleeting sense of time implicit in the *vanitas*, and there were pieces here that worked well. In *Poetry*, 1998, Oursler projects on the inside of a skull-shaped death mask a video shot from the viewpoint of a person walking through a graveyard. The beautiful images powerfully connect interior thought and physical movement through the world. In my favorite piece, *Still Life*, 1998, the recorded features of different people commingle freakishly, and the skull-scrim rests atop a pile of books on subjects like dissociation and memory distortion.

An artist of Oursler's generation and of the NYC/Cal Arts milieu probably would not consider "grown-up" to be a complimentary verdict. But particularly after the aggressive adolescence in recent work by many of his peers, Oursler's own exhibition was encouragingly adult.

—Katy Siegel

## LAURA OWENS

GAVIN BROWN'S  
ENTERPRISE

By now, we've come to expect stylistic eclecticism from Laura Owens. In one of her new paintings (all works untitled, 1998), whimsically plump bumblebees buzz around a colorful hive; another features a closely toned autumn landscape with an enameled sliver of blue brook and part of a tree limb poking into the picture. A couple of paint-

ings resemble nothing so much as giant doodles—a curvilinear design, drawn with a silver pen and partially filled in with thin washes of murky magenta, covers the entire surface of one canvas; in another, loops of paint squeezed into wobbly circular shapes sit on the surface like thin coiled ropes of colored yarn. But then, a big abstract painting with mounds of ice-cream colors heaped on a sky-blue ground and sprinkled with chunks and flicks of paint is like nothing you've ever seen.

One of the most pronounced tendencies in painting in the late '90s is an attraction to entropic sites—in Owens's work, the exhaustion in question turns around the ever-moribund opposition between abstraction and representation. Precedents from the previous decade come readily to mind—Peter Halley's geometric "cells" and "conduits," Ashley Bickerton's "wall" paintings, Philip Taaffe's Newmanesque "zips." By comparison, however, Owens's work, while it plays fast and loose with the mixing of abstract and representational modes, never so much as hints at a dialectic: There's no urge to rise from the ashes, to get somewhere else, to restore heroic achievement to painting, to prove a point. Instead, her canvases seem laid-back and whimsical. The "country-cute" beehive painting is rendered in a palette of brown, rust, orange, and gold that unmistakably suggests '70s decor. The open, inviting landscape—are the floating monochromatic shapes rocks in a field, clouds in the sky, islands in the sea?—is lightheartedly reminiscent of retro, printed upholstery fabric. Much to her credit, Owens pulls off "casual" without resorting to big statements about being low-key. She makes

painting look easy—too easy, perhaps, in the doodle pieces. But when she's on her mark, the smooth, feel-good premise of her work is realized with extreme confidence, and we then see just how good a painter she is.

In the barely there, palomino-hued, autumn landscape, Owens's relaxed sensibility translates as all the space and time in the world. A bright falling-leaf motif—a few red and gold leaves on the tree limb, others floating in the brook that winds languidly into deep space—is the only disruption in the light, scenic vista. The pleasurable infinity it suggests is as much a result of what she paints as how she paints it. Similarly, in her most ambitious "abstract" painting—the one with scoops of "tasteful" colors in pale blue, coffee, lime, and white—the carefree, even subtly euphoric play with paint seduces. The effervescing mounds are animated by an orbital field of painterly marks that spin off into blue space, nuggets of paint that seem to crash in fissures where edges don't meet, and rainbow-variegated smears and squiggles that ricochet around the painting, sometimes spiraling into deep space, at other times slapping up against the picture plane. Nothing breaks the lyrical buoyancy and, by extension, the sense of well-being Owens describes. What's equally impressive is her ability to render the space of painting so free and clear of its own historical baggage. In short, there's little to buy into except the pleasure of painting, and paint wielded by someone who really knows what they're doing—that's always a thing of beauty to behold.

—Jan Avgikos

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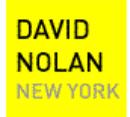
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## Laura Owens

GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE | NEW YORK

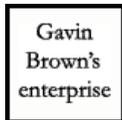
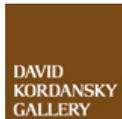
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—Jan Avgikos

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REVIEWS

NEW YORK  
**MIKE BIDLO**  
TONY SHAFRAZI

For almost two decades, Mike Bidlo has engaged in a strict simulation of the work and practices of iconic figures of twentieth-century art. Pollock and Picasso in the 'Six, de Chirico, Léger, and Warhol in the 'seventies—these august precursors have served as models for Bidlo to muse about and make conscious with the moderate canon. Far from being mere acts of disavowal, Bidlo's tactics were self-consciously strategic: The exact copy pasted/reproduced the notion of the original suspect, thereby (again paradoxically) undermining the ontological system that makes "great" art great. Shortly Levine issued a similar vein with her series of works "Alice"



Mike Bidlo, *Fountain Drawing no. 2020, 1993-96*. Mixed media on paper, 22 1/2 x 32"



Tony Oursler, *Foxy Hunter, 1998*. Mixed media, 27 x 22 x 30"

some exercise. But something approaching conviction inflects these excursions. By limiting his attention to one centrally repeated object, albeit one almost overflowing with associations, Bidlo opens a prism to visual variation. Instantly striking in the association between the shape of the animal and that of the human body. Quickly jostled, delicately rendered, or slumped down to ground, Bidlo's iterations have a portable quality. Stuck on the gallery wall in a highland color style, the drawings of first glance look like hand-drawn in a poorly planned notebook or even "watercolor" posters in a post office. Viewed individually, they appear as body parts—phallos and testicles, of course, but also vaginas, fingertips, noses, mouths, lungs, even hearts. One hesitates to rehearse the tired postmodernist formula, but there really is a play here between presence and absence. We stare at a hole, make it into a bodily part, and will a whole out of it, only to reverse the process.

Bidlo has succeeded—if success is the right word—in making explicit what was implicit in Duchamp's work (which "great hole" not only in Conceptual art, but perhaps also to Minimalism): our narcissistic desire to see ourselves even in and as a pin-up poster used to find our reflection there momentarily beautiful or at least interesting.

—Sara Israel

**TONY OURSLER**  
METRO PICTURES

Watching a video in a gallery can't help but remind us of watching TV at home, even if the artist is required, as in much

recent work, to make the image very large. This is a problem not because TV is bad, but because it is good, that it is so compelling. For *Who's the Boss* next to *Bill Veale*, and most people will eyeball the former. One solution to this on-screen contest is to combine video with other media, as Tony Oursler does in his spectacular hybrid. Oursler is best known for projecting videotaped faces onto blank, three-dimensional and shapes that mimically suggest heads. This show improved on the formula, moving objects through the use of more elaborate forms on which to screen the videos: strikingly large three-glass skulls and glass cores of objects like dillies and vases statures the latter unfortunately somewhat clichéd. Although the skulls share the blank whiteness of his earlier "heads," they complicate the work both visually and psychologically, emphasizing the gulf between the animated (though almost videotaped) people and the inanimate (but present) objects.

Oursler's show trafficked in death, decay, and the societal march of time. "Heavy" sters on death and image-making (both read about over speakers and projected on objects), however, do not automatically confer gravitas onto artists. And too many are historical references (Vandy, 1998, recalls Diner with its immunities of art and knowledge) or kitsch associations (the growth leaking from the eye socket of *Hole*, 1998, call to mind the grapes of the Caribbean side of Disneyworld) can undermine the subject matter. In these instances, the work functions more as plays on traditional still life than as something approaching a true contemporary aesthetic along the lines of,

say, Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work. Oursler might reply to these criticisms by saying he was being ironic, if not I missed the irony (and liked the seriousness). The temporality of video is precisely what suited to the fleeting sense of time implicit in the canvas, and all these pieces have that worked well. In *Portrait*, 1998, Oursler projects on the inside of a skull-shaped death mask a video shot from the viewpoint of a person walking through a graveyard. The beautiful images powerfully connect interior thought and physical movement through the world.

In my favorite piece, *Self*, 1998, the rounded features of different people seemingly frantically, and the skull-screen men stop a pile of books on subjects like dissociation and memory distortion.

An artist of Oursler's generation and of the NYC/C&A Arts milieu probably would not consider "grown-up" to be a complimentary word. But particularly after the aggressive adolescence in recent work by many of his peers, Oursler's own exhibition was encouragingly whole.

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By now, we've come to expect stylistic excursions from Laura Owens. In one of her new paintings (all words unified, 1998), whimsically plump handletters bear around a colorful haze, another features a densely packed autumn landscape with an eroded shore of blue break and part of a tree limb poking into the picture. A couple of paint-

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Susan Hobbs

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