

GALLERY-GOING

# The New Year's Group Dynamic

By ALIX FINKELSTEIN

The New Year is often a time for looking both backward and forward, and some of the city's best art galleries have similarly divided their attentions. Group exhibitions mounted this month either look to the past, featuring shows of historical interest, or focus on the future, showcasing new talent and new directions for art.

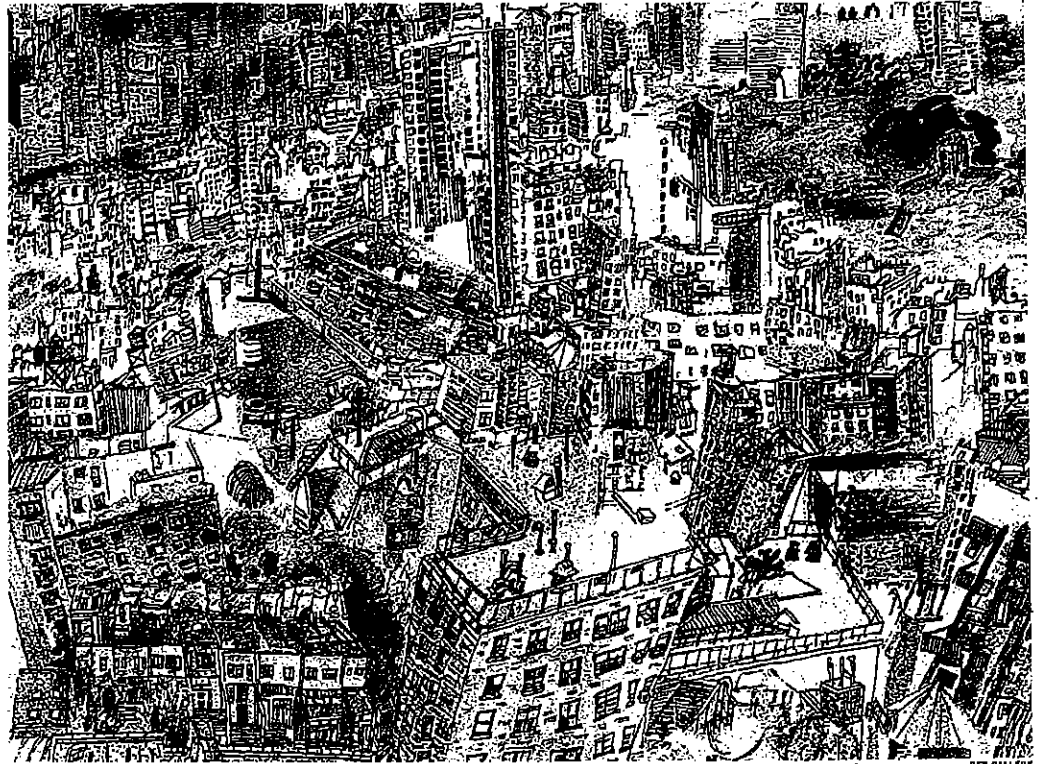
Currently on view at the Peter Freeman Gallery in SoHo, "The Hand-drawn Negative: Clichés-Verre by Corot, Daubigny, Delacroix, Millet, and Rousseau (1854-1862)" is the first visit to America of this private collection of highly unusual 19th-century master drawings. Cliché-verre images were among the earliest artistic experiments with the still novel medium of photography. Artists would draw with an etching needle on a chemically treated glass plate, creating a negative that would then be reproduced or "photographed" by being placed against light-sensitive paper and exposed to the sun. Realist painter Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot was one of the medium's most enthusiastic experimenters. His landscape drawings demonstrate the cliché-verre's capacity to produce fluid, animated surfaces. Charles-François Daubigny's drawings are

similarly striking.

Opening January 10th at the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery is "African American Art: 200 Years," an ambitious and comprehensive installation that traces, from early American portraiture through contemporary works of assemblage and collage, the contribu-

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tions of black artists to American painting and sculpture. The exhibition includes important artists working in the postwar era, such as Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden, who dedicated their oeuvres to depicting black figures and community life. But also on view will be works by black abstract expressionist Norman Lewis and expressionist sculptor Elizabeth



Oliver Ayhens, 'Reflected Scope' (2007).

Catlett. Equally compelling and well-represented will be works by lesser-known black artists of earlier eras, such as the academic painter Henry O. Tanner and his student William Edouard Scott, a proponent of American Impressionism. Scott and his peers were influenced by European Modernism, and some even traveled abroad to absorb the formal lessons of Cézanne and Picasso, but they received little institutional recognition in their own country. Also to be shown is a rare work by Joshua Johnson, a free black portrait artist who gained favor among Maryland's merchant class in the early 1800s. "Girl Wearing a Bonnet" depicts a young Caucasian woman and reminds us that, for a larger part of American art history, black artists restricted their subject matter to suit the tastes of their white patrons, resulting in a significant and poignant absence of black faces, but a large body of landscapes, still lifes, and genre pictures.

Although Richard Serra's mammoth steel sculptures at the Museum of Modern Art are no longer on view, two of his smaller, gallery-friendly pieces produced in the 1980s can still be seen at the Andrea Rosen Gallery. "90°: The Margins as Center" features Mr. Serra's works alongside three wall- or corner-based installations first produced in the 1960s by Serra's Minimalist and Post-minimalist brethren, Robert Morris, Lynda Benglis, and James Turrell. Pursuing their respective concerns of space, materiality, and perceptual experience, as these historical reconstructions demonstrate, all three artists produced works foundational to Mr. Serra's development as both a sculptor and an environmental artist.

To see how younger artists are redefining and reinvigorating fig-

urative and landscape traditions, stop by DFN Gallery to see its "Works on Paper" exhibition. The show features over 20 of DFN Gallery's represented artists, many of them freshly minted graduates of New York's painting academies and almost all of them dedicated to producing representational art. These artists use traditional mediums in innovative and arresting new ways. Zaria Forman's grisaille pastel landscapes, for example, bring to mind Gerhard Richter's photo paintings. The meticulously rendered imagery in some of the youngest artists' work is both comical and subversive. The bath-

room is a recurring interior in many of Melanie Vote's works. A 1996 graduate of the New York Academy of art, she uses sepia tones for ominous effects in her oil-on-paper "Sink Alter," a study of the underbelly of a porcelain sink bowl. Or consider the work of Jean-Pierre Arboleda, who just completed his master's degree in painting in 2006. In "Corona de Conejos," his phantasmagorical creatures, drawn with colored pencil and acrylic, participate in scenes of conflict and sexual conquest.

Artists continue to expand the boundaries of traditional graphic

expression, not just thematically, but also through a dramatic increase in scale. "Big Drawing," at Lori Bookstein Fine Art, features five artists who have produced monumental drawings in charcoal, pastel, and even Plexiglas. Karlis Rekevics's abstract charcoal on paper "Opinion, Thought, Belief" occupies the entire back wall of the gallery, while Graham Nickson's richly textured "Departure" measures over 13 feet in width and 6 feet in height. The evocative charcoal drawing of ocean bathers achieves the elegance of figural compositioning found in a Renaissance *cartone*.

