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September 21 - November 19, 2004



Linda Darling

A F T E R J A Z Z

From Piet Mondrian to Jacob Lawrence to the Abstract Expressionists, artists in the twentieth century found their hands and minds guided by the rhythms and colors of jazz. For some it was conscious; for many it just came naturally.

Mondrian formally and strictly translated boogie-woogie, while progressive jazz musician and painter Miles Davis performed instinctually, explaining, "I work from the subconscious. . . . Once the form is there, it's like an arrangement with openings for solos. It's a matter of balance. You can't have too much black. Like you can't have too much saxophone. Supposing there's a composition and the saxophone player can't get the style. You have to get another guy to fit in there. Like another color."

While the imagery, media, and modes of expression continue to change in the paintings of the newborn twenty-first century, the spirit and diversity of jazz pervade the works of many today, including Radcliffe Bailey, Linda Darling, Karen Dow, Nicholas Howey, Dirk Krecker, Giles Lyon, Larry Mullins, Ruth Root, Calvin Seibert, and David Storey.

These artists reflect the boundless, rule-bashing manifestations and intermarriages of jazz—from boogie-woogie to ragtime, honky-tonk, blues, swing, pop, and progressive jazz. And they do so through interplays of shapes, gesture, and the magical dynamics of color and through syncopation and improvisation, conveying everything from passion to dejection to sexuality and loneliness. They challenge, Can you see what I hear?

Linda Darling shows, through images of nature—especially

birds—constructed through linear swirls, how our perception of the world solidifies and dissolves with an insistent rhythm beyond our intellectual control. They've all got rhythm, the birds and bees—natural rhythm—and Darling adds a bit of unnatural to the mix. Her subjects have been bred and genetically manipulated to be "fancy." Jazz and sex, as she shows the birds in mating splendor, seduce in tandem.

Karen Dow, by contrast, boogies to a more intense beat, aiming at the psychological with an anxious display of colors in geometric shapes. In some paintings, a pattern appears to be in constant motion across the surface; in others we must dig down deep for rhythm through post-Mondrian, post-Josef Albers squares and rectangles, creating layers of eye-boggling, shifting shapes and colors. The sensation is of a hall of mirrors, leading the eye back and forth in time and memory.

In **Larry Mullins's** paintings, words and images are kept in kinetic flux. They don't so much signify in themselves but rather perform as visual dynamics. Rhythm is achieved by playing the almost familiar and meaningful against the distorted, such as arbitrarily capitalized letters or Gothic ones, interspersed mid-word. Sizes and shapes of the letters are unexpected and play in counterpoint with hints of meaning and the words' arbitrariness, their status as symbols, their louds and softs.

Not too far from Surrealism, **Calvin Seibert** tricks the eye by forcing it to engage in some mental construction. In one image, a cartoonish man in a hat looks out an empty window set in a capsule tricked out like a home—which could be his mind—while our eyes scan a window-size townscape atop the capsule and, inside, a stairway leading to nowhere—and back. In his abstract paintings, Seibert plays with sticks and blobs, their colors making the structures seem to walk. He keeps our eyes in constant motion, confounded in their efforts to organize.

Ruth Root's art follows a more melodic line, more self-contained, more analogous to the voice of Julie London or of Ella Fitzgerald. Warm, slightly off-key tones inform the off-geometrical shapes that fit together as perfectly as puzzle pieces and somehow engage, please, and also disorient us. She offers an elegant spin on an almost recognizable refrain.

Also hewing to a melodic line, and with great economy of color and gesture, **Nicholas Howey** creates rhythms that are smooth, well formed, and introspective, like a moaning sax. In these concise riffs—dark-toned squares with brilliant, illuminated centers that play especially well in ensembles of images—intense colors lead the eye on a circuitous route. He knows how to hold a note and then release it slowly into an intense, surprising tone.

Though nearly obsolete as a writing tool, the typewriter performs as producer and director in **Dirk Krecker's** dense, abstract tapestries of typed slashes, colons, and the like. As both medium and musical instrument, the typewriter's staccato beats resonate in the conglomeration of marks it produces as it relays tightly controlled variations on a theme.



Radcliffe Bailey



Nicholas Howey



Dirk Kreckler



Ruth Root

The jazz in **Radcliffe Bailey's** work is both a translation into painting and a cultural reference. Photographs of his family and other African American figures are surrounded by a riot of bright and discordant colors and shapes, like loud and celebratory music, but with a history always at the core.

With his hot and cool tones, rhythmic narrative type rambles, and variety of inventive forms that send the eye on merry jaunts, **David Storey** leads us down and through melody and memory lanes with almost-recognizable forms as guides telling us where and when to pause. Think of Louis Armstrong.

Meanwhile, as if in summary, **Giles Lyon** hits the cymbals hard and lets the horns blast as his action swings all over the keyboard. His cacophonous, many-layered paintings embody the jazz of today's multicultural, overstimulated, media-blasted environment.

It's all music to our eyes.

Barbara MacAdam
Senior Editor, *ARTnews*
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Larry Mullins



Karen Dow



Calvin Selbert

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Linda Darling, Karen Dow, and Larry Mullins
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