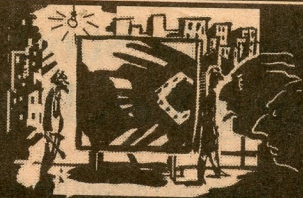


## Currently Hanging



**MARIO NAVES**

# Philip Pearlstein: A Drab Hand Flaunts a Keen Eccentric Streak

The more Philip Pearlstein keeps on doing what he does—painting dispassionate, starkly cropped studio set-ups pairing folk art with naked, usually female models—the more the usual complaints apply. It's equally true, though, that the more he keeps on keeping on, the more unguarded and eccentric he becomes.

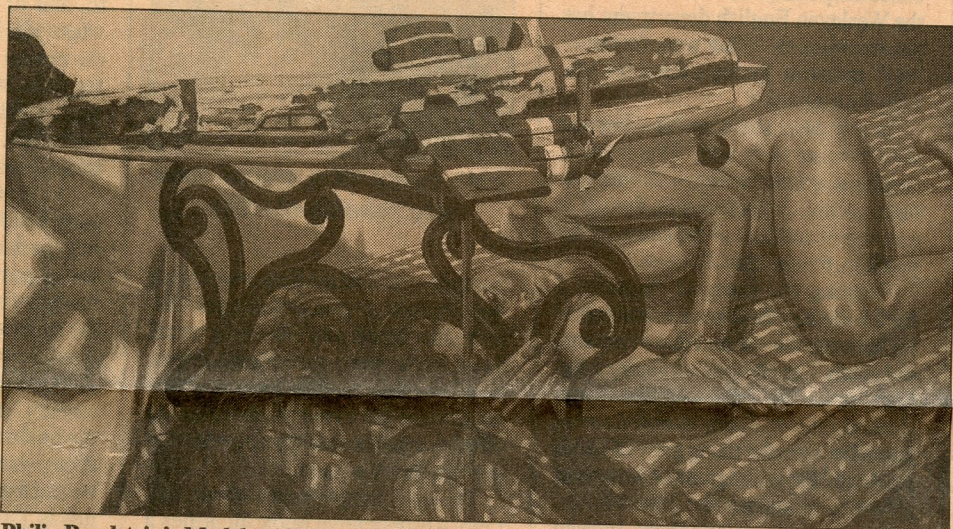
His recent efforts at the Betty Cunningham Gallery confirm the quibbles. Mr. Pearlstein is as drab a hand as ever. "Perfunctory" is too strong a word for the way he lays on paint. The palette similarly lacks invention; flesh, in particular, is rendered dull and unfeeling. Though a stickler for appearances and proportions, Mr. Pearlstein's depictions of the human form can be unconvincingly and dispiritedly

*Philip Pearlstein is at the Betty Cunningham Gallery, 541 West 25th Street, until Oct. 22.*

### WHITE-BREAD NOIR

The aspirations and disappointments of suburban America continue

dreamy narratives by painting from preexisting images—photos that look like they're cut out of mass-circulation magazines circa 1957. He renders them in a soft monochrome, usually black and white, at times with a greenish cast, or in a palette that



Philip Pearlstein's *Model on Cast Iron Bed with Weathervane Airplane, #1, 2005*.



dered dull and unfeeling. Though a stickler for appearances and proportions, Mr. Pearlstein's depictions of the human form can be ungainly and disjointed. A foot is too big here, an eye doesn't sit well there, an arm juts forward into space unconvincingly. These are anatomical and pictorial gaffes that no figurative painter should allow himself.

But who would have guessed, some 40 years ago, that his signature dialogue between representation and abstraction would evolve into such a remarkable comedy of manners? Mr. Pearlstein's collection of vintage bric-a-brac doesn't just cohabitate with the nude women portrayed in the paintings. An inflatable chair, a duck kiddie car, a pink flamingo and a kilim rug each receive equal billing to the figures they accompany, and they engage in whimsical and, at times, surprisingly multivalent narratives.

*Model on Cast Iron Bed with Weathervane Airplane, #1* (2005) is a droll joke on the limits of male desire. (To paraphrase Freud: Sometimes a weathervane is more than a weathervane.) In its own phlegmatic way, though, it might also be a meditation on 9/11. Of course, I may be reading too much into it, but terrorism has forever altered the implications of air travel. All the same, it's refreshing that the picture can accommodate such a range of interpretations, from salacious to somber. It reveals an artist who has barely tapped into the considerable metaphorical possibilities of his work. His pictorial gaffes, then, are less liabilities than subtle yet integral components of his peculiar vision. As far as I'm concerned, Mr. Pearlstein has only begun painting. May he keep at it for another 40 years.



Philip Pearlstein's *Model on Cast Iron Bed with Weathervane Airplane, #1, 2005*.

to haunt the paintings of Martin Mull, on display at the Spike Gallery. Mr. Mull's collage-like juxtapositions of middle-class trappings and noirish,

takes its cues from overexposed and faded Kodachrome snapshots.

Mr. Mull can't quite relinquish a certain smugness of tone; he has a

## To paraphrase Freud: Sometimes a weathervane is more than a weathervane.

dissociated figures are suffused with a dry, absurdist melancholy. A pasticheur through and through, Mr. Mull cobbles together his wry and

tendency to flaunt his distance and smarts. Those leanings are nevertheless offset by an acknowledgment and acceptance of mixed feelings.

### ERIC CROWHURST

## Bridge

West judged well not to double 6S on today's deal from team play. He was likely to make two trump tricks if he declined to give South any warning about the 4-0 break, and it was clear that any plus-score on the East-West cards would give them an excellent teams score:

North dealt; neither side vulnerable.

North  
 ♠ K 9 3  
 ♥ K 5 2  
 ♦ A Q 6 4  
 ♣ J 4 3

West

♠ Q J 10 8  
 ♥ 10 9 8  
 ♦ K 10 5  
 ♣ 8 6 2

East

♠ A 10 7 6 4 3  
 ♥ Q J 9 8 3  
 ♦ J 9 8 3  
 ♣ 9 7 5

South

♠ A 7 6 5 4 2  
 ♥ A  
 ♦ 7 2  
 ♣ A K Q 10

South	West	North	East
		1D	Pass
1S	Pass	1NT	Pass
3C	Pass	4S	Pass
6S	Pass <sup>1</sup>	Pass	Pass

<sup>1</sup> Plus-100 seems to be on the way.

West led H10 against the final contract of 6S. Declarer won with HA and immediately led a trump to-