

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Linda Yablonsky, "The Rondinone Spirit," *T Magazine*, March 27th, 2012.



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CULTURE | By LINDA YABLONSKY | MARCH 27, 2012, 5:00 PM



"The Spirit Level," a group show at Gladstone Gallery curated by the artist Ugo Rondinone, includes Peter Buggenhout's sculptures from everyday detritus, "The Blind Leading the Blind"; Kim Jones's "Mudman Structure" from 1974; and a star painting by Joe Bradley, "Untitled" (2012). *David Regen, courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels*

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 FULL SCREEN

Last weekend the windows of Barbara Gladstone's two galleries in Chelsea were soaped over. That's not because the blue-chip dealer suddenly closed up shop. Predictably, the soaping is the work of an artist, [Ugo Rondinone](#). Fortunately, no one is claiming the windows as his art.

The soap is there to diffuse the daylight pouring into "The Spirit Level," a beauty-meets-inner-beast group show that the Swiss-born Rondinone has put together with works by 19 other artists he admires and collects. It's also his 75th birthday card for the Beat poet John Giorno, with whom Rondinone, 48, has been living for the last 14 years.

Whatever the show says about their relationship, if anything, it tells us a lot about Rondinone as an advocate for art that can enlighten, amuse, titillate, flatter and shiver the spirits of everyone else.

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Yellowing pebbles that substitute for teeth in the face of a hollow-eyed Madonna, as depicted in 1970s paintings by the late Swiss primitive Hans Schärer, line the entry to Gladstone's West 21st Street space. They are among the more obscure works in an exhibition that introduces or rediscovers many. "It's real Swiss humor," Rondinone said of Schärer's nubby Madonnas during a walk-through of the show. "Nobody here knows about him."

Only a few may be aware of Sam Gilliam, a color-field painter now in his 70s. Fifty years ago, Gilliam was the first American artist to show paintings off their stretchers, folding, twisting and draping them into sculptural hybrids. Two gorgeous swaths of Gilliam's recent pigment-stained works hang from a wall and the ceiling, spilling onto the floor like estuaries of bright camouflage.

They make a striking contrast with hulking brown dust-coated megaliths that look like mammoth industrial remains from a lost civilization, except that the Belgian artist Peter Buggenhout made them more or less on the spot from everyday detritus. The faux ruins also suggest rotting military machines, an impression only deepened by Joe Bradley's stark paintings of big black, five-pointed stars and an assemblage of dried branches, heavy sausages and muddy boots by Kim Jones, the set for mud-caked performances during the show that evoke his service in the Vietnam War. The whole scene looks like a mirage. Rondinone calls it "a space of enchantment."

Things get even more intense upstairs, with boxed fertility figures made entirely of cigarette butts by the late Al Hansen — another Beat poet as well as a Fluxus artist and habitué of Warhol's Factory, where *Giorno* also put in time. (He was the subject of Warhol's seminal 1963 film, "Sleep.") To complement Hansen's "Suitcase Venus" works, Rondinone hung a throat-catching series of black-and-white photographs of a gauze-covered man undergoing what looks like ritualistic sexual surgery — actually a private performance from 1965 by Rudolf Schwarzkogler, a Viennese Actionist who died at 28.

As a young artist, Rondinone worked with Herman Nitsche, the most visceral of the Actionists, before going on to make the fuzzy target paintings, tinted window sculptures and resin casts of ancient olive trees that are among his best-known works.

Mostly, Rondinone thinks of art as a transcendental discipline, an idea partly informed by his proximity to *Giorno*, a Buddhist who was a pal of the novelists William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, authors of an influential book of cut-and-pasted stories called "The Third Mind." Rondinone borrowed the title for another group show he organized five years ago at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris to celebrate *Giorno*'s 70th birthday. "Living with John intervenes in my thinking," Rondinone said.

That show won Rondinone acclaim as a curator, but he says the job is still an exception to his usual practice: making art and collecting it. "It's stimulating to have other people's ghosts in the house," he said. "I believe they radiate a magic."

At Gladstone's West 24th Street space, viewers first must step over the tattered prayer rugs from which the Moroccan-born Latifa Echakhch has removed all but the edges and scattered them

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about like discarded picture frames. They lead past Ann Craven's serial paintings of a full moon to a room where Sarah Lucas's Pepto-Bismol-pink cast-rubber tree trunks with phallic tops stand tall before paintings made from curling posters that Klara Liden ripped off city walls. Another room, dominated by a dozen ceramic sculptures, on pedestals, by Andrew Lord, is an ode to classical form in black, white and pewter gray.

A back room contains roughened reclining figures from the 1970s by another Swiss artist, Hans Josephsohn. They seem more freshly minted, especially combined with Amy Granat's recent photograms of flowers and wall hangings of linked patchwork triangles by Alan Shields, a nearly forgotten art star of the early '80s. Rondinone owns several pieces, which makes their inclusion here appear a nervy attempt to raise Shields's market value. That's not it, Rondinone insisted. "What's important about mixing all these artists," he said, "is to show the roots with the fruit. People forget where some of these ideas came from."

"The Spirit Level" continues through April 21 at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery, 515 West 24th Street and 530 West 21st Street.

This post has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: March 28, 2012

Hans Schärer's works are being shown at the Gladstone's West 21st Street space, not at 24th Street. Kim Jones's assemblage consists of dried branches, heavy sausages and muddy boots not muddy shows. Finally an artist's name was misspelled, her name is Latifa Echakhch, not Latifa Echkach.

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Sam Gilliam's "Wall Cascade" (1990-2011) with a glimpse of Hans Schärer's Madonnas in the background.



The Beat poet and Fluxus artist Al Hansen's "Suitcase Venus" works, made from cigarette butts. Photographs of a private performance from 1965 by the Viennese Actionist Rudolf Schwarzkogler can be seen in the background.

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In another room, Andrew Lord's ceramic sculptures sit on pedestals. The San Francisco artist Jay DeFeo's pieces "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" (1989), hang on the walls. (There are in fact eight of them.)



Reclining figures by Hans Josephs share a room with Amy Granat's photographs of flowers and Alan Shields's "A Moment's Hesitation" (1981-82).