

Richard Artschwager

Gagosian

Richard Artschwager has never fit easily into mainstream art history. He has flirted with Pop art, Minimalism, Conceptual art, and even performance art, but cannot be fully identified with any of them. Artschwager's wit, craft, and elusive esthetic have long enchanted those willing to remain puzzled. This latest show of mostly figure and landscape paintings, perhaps most surprising for their use of color, confirmed his singular place in the contemporary-art world.

Deadpan titles complemented the sometimes offbeat subject matter, which ranged from abstract to figurative. Artschwager played with Cubist perspective in *Abstract* (2004), while pink and orange boxes stacked on one another filled a yellow and blue landscape in *Desert Growth* (2005). Three individuals hovering around a floating table in *Some People* (2004) seemed caught up in their thoughts, oblivious to one another as well as their ambiguous predicament, leaving the viewer to speculate on how they came to be there. The obliquely narrative subject matter was rendered in Artschwager's characteristic style, by turns primitive and mechanistic. More important than any stories, however, were the references to 19th-century itinerant portrait painting, to postcards of faraway places, to the craftsman tradition so central to the American self-image. The artist's interest



Richard Artschwager, *2 Clouds*, 2004, acrylic on fiber panel in artist's frame, 50 1/2" x 75". Gagosian.

in craft, as well his pervasive dry humor, is reflected in the thin, zebra-striped frames with which he brackets many of his paintings.

There appears to be something awry in all of these works. Their peculiar composition, opaque meanings, and strange scale are weird and knowingly ill-fit.

Such dissonances produce an under-the-skin frisson we have come to appreciate as pure Artschwager. —Peter Frank

UP NOW

'Courbet and the Modern Landscape'

J. Paul Getty Museum
Through May 14

In this focused and illuminating exhibition, the museum's first major show devoted to 19th-century art, Getty curators Mary Morton and Charlotte Eyerman address the often overlooked landscapes of that most influential of painters, Gustave Courbet. After moving to Paris from the region of Franche-Comte on the Swiss border, the artist gained notoriety as a rebel and bon vivant. Since his death in 1877, his reputation as a politically engaged and self-promoting painter of the working classes has been solidified. Courbet, however, maintained an attachment to

landscape painting, specifically the countryside of his youth. Views of the rocky cliffs and shadowy forests of his native region are well represented among these 47 paintings, and this show proves they were very much tied to his more well known works.

Long considered to be less important than his figural paintings, his landscapes are shown here to be confrontational and darkly romantic. They certainly got the attention of

younger artists like Cézanne, who revered Courbet. *The Gust of Wind* (ca. 1865) portrays an unseen current ripping clouds across the sky and twisting an enormous tree into gnarled skeins of green and blue. From a distance of ten feet, the painting is a masterly nature study. Up close the slabs of rock laid in

by palette knife and the cords of color twisting in the trees offer proof of the artist's painterly prowess.

Courbet's heart may have belonged to Franche-Comte, but his soul soared on the coast of Normandy, where he painted swooning seascapes of radically spare composition. Without people or cabanas, these simple studies of clotted skies and smears of ocean provide a ravishing release from the tenebrous forests and glades. This targeted investigation of one part of a prominent artist's oeuvre offers a privileged perspective in the best sense,



Gustave Courbet, *The Gust of Wind*, ca. 1865, oil on canvas, 56 1/2" x 90". J. Paul Getty Museum.

a show for an audience that cares about art rather than spectacle.

—Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

This exhibition will be at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from the 18th of next month through September 10, and at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore from October 15 through January 7, 2007.

Peter Shelton

LA Louver

For the gallery's 30th anniversary, LA Louver mounted the magnum opus of one of the city's most consistently challenging, entertaining, and distinctive artists. Peter Shelton began conceptualizing and even fabricating some of the 180-odd parts on view here as early as 1989, but his sprawling sculptural installation *godspipes* (1997–98) only came together just before its 1998 debut at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. There it was spread among a number of smaller spaces around a courtyard. Since that time it has been in storage.

Here all but one of its discrete parts were arrayed on the four walls of a single gallery, like so many hunting trophies or paleontological treasures.