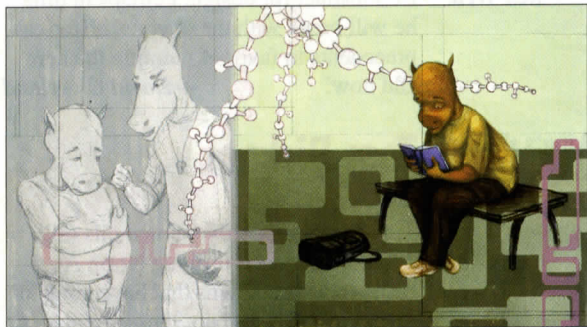


over these scenes are collaged and painted abstract forms.

Many of the stories were emotional dramas of adolescence: in *Untitled (#3)* (2004), a boy (with a dog's head) is shown in one panel being chided by his football coach (or possibly his father); in the adjacent panel, he sits absorbed in a



Kojo Griffin, *Untitled (#3)*, 2004, acrylic-and-graphite collage on panel, 19 1/2" x 35 1/2" x 1 1/2". Mitchell-Innes & Nash.

book. In another painting, two adolescents, one with a dog's head and the other with the head of an elephant, raid a stash of pornography.

The show also included Griffin's first foray into sculpture: a large, Buddha-like, elephant-headed figure that squats on a low plinth, pointing a remote control at the viewer. Next to him is a stack of X-rated videos. Griffin is one of the more compelling artists working in a mode indebted to cartoons. The move to an increasingly narrative approach seems to indicate a new and promising complexity in the artist's dramas and style.

—Sarah Douglas

James Barsness

George Adams

R. Crumb meets Hieronymus Bosch in James Barsness's recent paintings. In this exhibition, "You Are Here," here was the hell of earthly experience—grotesque, pathetic, and bestial.

My Red House (2003), the show's centerpiece, suggested that home sweet home is the epicenter of this torment. The painting depicts a menagerie of lusty humanoid freaks—lizard people, dog people, pig people—in and around a bungalow, energetically ravaging one another. With cartoonish saucer eyes, the characters appear moronic and bewildered. Despite the sex, no one is having a good time.

Barsness's fire and brimstone, however, is leavened considerably by the nonchalance of his method. Though the paintings have an antique, Old Master glow and the drawing is meticulous, the materials are quotidian, even crude. The artist glued layers of miscellaneous found paper onto canvas and drew over and scratched the collage with a ballpoint pen. Layers of paint and ink were then built up, scraped, scrubbed, tortured, and built up again to arrive at the finished images. *My Princess Dress* (2004) was painted over Casper the Ghost comics, crossword puzzles, newsprint, and other debris. The princess, lovingly rendered over this miscel-

lany, is a nasty combination of Bozo the Clown and Medusa; her dress is part royal, part harlequin.

Also on view were eccentric, fetishistic sculptures, many seemingly inspired by Zap Comix. In one, for example, a cloven-footed female is molested by a rabbit, but it was not funny enough to bear the weight of its vulgarity.

Bosch and Crumb are hard acts to follow, but Barsness turns in a convincing



James Barsness, *My Red House*, 2003, mixed media, 49 1/2" x 67 1/2". George Adams.

effort. He suggests that we all have private hells; he is exceptionally good at depicting his.

—*Rex Weil*

'Constable's Skies'

Salander-O'Reilly

Contemporary eyes often find a sketch more appealing than a fully developed painting. Economy of means and the hasty track of the brush impart an imme-

diacy and freshness often spoiled by labor and varnish. John Constable, in all probability, would not share this modern view, but his sky studies, when isolated from the rest of his oeuvre, certainly support it.

In an exhibition that paid homage not only to Constable but also to the art of the sketch, Salander-O'Reilly brought together a choice selection of studies from the artist's "skying" period, from 1820 to 1830. Constable never intended to exhibit these mini-masterpieces, which are studies not for more ambitious canvases but representing Constable's studious ef-



John Constable, *Cloudy Study with Treetops and Buildings 10th of September 1821*, oil on paper, 9 1/4" x 11 1/2". Salander-O'Reilly.

forts to understand clouds—their structure and effect on the overall luminosity of the sky.

Executed on the spot, usually in less than an hour, the paintings are small in size and narrow in palette. Yet they exhibit an amazing variety of tone and brushstroke as they deftly record the rapidly changing, cloud-swollen skies over Brighton, Hampstead Heath, and Salisbury. Each sketch depicts a specific season, time of day, and weather condition. *Brighton Beach (June 12, 1824)*, for instance, shows a late spring sky darkened by heavy waves of low-lying storm clouds. Constable also executed "pure cloud" sketches, such as *Cloud Study* (1822), in which a dark vertical column of cloud frames a pale, cool patch of air where partially illuminated cumulus clouds mass into sculptural gobs.

Given this gloriously naked brushwork—swirls, squiggles, blots, dots, swathes, streaks, scabs, and crusts of transparent and opaque oil paint—it was tempting to take an art-for-art's-sake view of the studies, to see them as elevated exercises in mark making. Yet, thankfully, the subject matter—nature—kept getting in the way. As a naturalist and a Romantic, Constable found in the sky a gentle sublime. The concept of