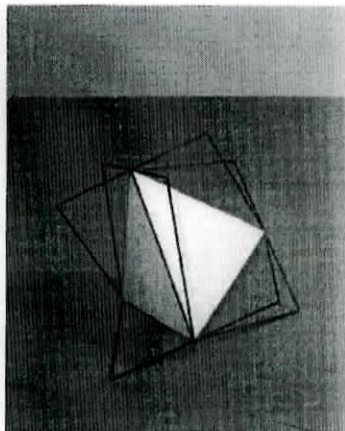


Peter Saul, *Suburban Homes I*, 1969, marker, gouache, and colored pencil on museum board, 39 x 45 1/2".



John Duff, *Inclined Form*, 2001, plaster and steel, 27 1/2 x 33 x 33 1/2".

throughout the gallery were sugar cubes and paper napkins and two heavily embroidered ceremonial robes.

Though there was something a little shameless in Nitsch's open theatricality—the brush, singular colors mashed on the walls, the religious paraphernalia, the clamoring sound track and props—there was also a kind of honesty and clarity of purpose at work, a true showman's broadness of expression. The effect Nitsch achieved was purgative, nearly homiletic: "You will have a God feeling now," one can imagine him exhorting his audience, shaking its lapels. The droning bells and huge swaths of color, for all their bombast, did manage to induce, at least in this viewer, a crude mental movement toward transcendence.

Why does Nitsch's work seem vaguely au courant? Perhaps the last decade's technological patina (or pallor) has finally worn off, and people want more earth in their art. Or maybe the political exigencies of the day call for more primal, bellowing expressions of angst. In any case, the search for transcendent meaning has gathered fresh urgency, and the energy Nitsch brings to his hoary practice can't be denied. Whatever path this man has followed, it seems to be working.

—Jonathan Raymond

## PETER SAUL

GEORGE ADAMS GALLERY

"Suburbia," an exhibition of Peter Saul's paintings and drawings from the mid- to late '60s, offers a look at the artist not only as scathing ironist but as maverick aesthete. Shocking pink and blazing complementaries jump from the

works' surfaces, creating a sense of inextricable tangle. Figures and objects fuse in a mad, comic chaos, and crayon and colored pencil, childish and garish, seem to be the perverse mediums of choice.

Saul doesn't care much for suburbia (apparently Mill Valley, California, was the inspiration) or, for that matter, America. These works spring from the rise of the counterculture and the conflict in Vietnam; military insignia appear, and the bourgeois family home is unmasked as a sexual hothouse—Mom's tight sweater and Dad's bulging crotch call up the concerns of Saul's contemporary Robert Crumb. In *Golden Gate Bridge*, ca. 1966, the structure is portrayed as a weird sex machine—the towers stand on what look like a foundation of breasts; a bystander's eyes bulge like erect penises at the glorious sight. Perversion, in psychoanalyst Robert Stoller's sense as the "erotic form of hatred" and colleague Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel's definition as the creation of an anal or upside-down universe, seems to be the order of the day.

To me the most engaging and ingenious works here were the architectural fantasies—morbidity funny takeoffs on familiar American buildings, showing them to be modernist clichés desperately trying to be advanced and up-to-date. Works such as *Modern Home (ABCD)*, ca. 1966, *Suburban Homes I*, 1969, and *Lake Tahoe*, ca. 1969, are masterpieces of black humor. They can be taken as dadaist attacks on Geometric Abstraction and "functional" architecture or a broad debunking by a representational artist on the pretentiousness of self-styled pure art. Art is always about something, Saul

seems to say, and, above all, about an attitude toward something.

Alongside the work's qualities as caricature is a certain "medieval" dimension: Things loom large or appear small depending on their places in the social hierarchy (note the big automobile-cum-duck in *Drive In*, 1964). Forms weave together with an extravagance worthy of an illuminated manuscript, mixing the grotesque and the sublime. But in the end, these works are about money, what money can buy, and the ridiculousness of it all. *Cash*, 1967–68, is big in America, but for Saul, art is bigger, and he uses its dynamics to reduce the greenback and the world that worships it to triviality. Like Daumier, Grosz, and *Mud* magazine, Saul is a shrewd observer of the social scene, and his work, too, will outlast its specific topics because it's a critique not only of capitalism California style but of human beings in all their inanity. Indeed, there's something apocalyptic about these images, suggesting that they're reminders of the vanity of all things—aesthetic "folies" making it clear that for all of suburbia's upscale ambitions, it is an incurably irrational place and state of mind.

—Donald Kuspit

## JOHN DUFF

KNOEDLER & CO.

The works in New York-based artist John Duff's recent exhibition "Designed with You in Mind: Various Sculptures, Various Entailed" are constructed according to the basic principles of geometry. *Inclined Form*, 2001, is a plaster