

four “recovering punk rockers” to smash their instruments. A slow-motion video showed them, clad in white, destroying the gear in the artist’s cavernous studio as if at the close of a concert, accompanied by a minor-key sound track. A pedestrian 5-foot-square oil painting, *Maelstrom (An Epic of Ambiguity)*, illustrates the shaft and the various instruments strewn on the floor. The artist then gathered, weighed, catalogued and labeled the fragments, rebuilt the instruments, and used them to record the video’s sound track.

Destroyed musical instruments abound in recent art, from the early work of Nam June Paik to Christian Marclay and others. Furthermore, smashing instruments has a long history in rock music, from (at least) The Who to Nirvana. Riederer offers his reconstruction as a metaphor for a reemphasis on formal considerations when (some argue) Neo-Conceptualism threatens to short-circuit young artists’ inclinations to patiently develop craft and skill. A Web site associated with this project (www.secretshape.com), with an informative essay by Colby Chamberlain reveals that it also draws on historical speculation about the mind-body problem, as by the early 20th-century doctor who weighed a body before and after death to determine the mass of its departing soul (hence Riederer’s weighing of the guitar fragments). The Web site notes as well that medical schools’ demand for cadavers led to rampant grave robbing, by men known as resurrectionists.

The visual elements of Riederer’s show didn’t support the heavy burden of this research; even the artist’s dream of restoring form to primacy was thwarted, since understanding the work involves so much reading. Nevertheless,

“The Resurrectionists” did show a young artist profitably considering the possibility that the spiritual resides in the material, with art as with bodies.

—Brian Boucher

Pia Fries at CRG

The mixed-medium compositions in Pia Fries’s ongoing project, “Loschaug,” were impelled by a book about insects and plants illustrated by Maria Sibylla Merian. A 17th-century naturalist, Merian demonstrated that metamorphosis from a chrysalis—and not (as the church saw it) spontaneous generation from mud—is how a moth or butterfly emerges. Taking such metamorphosis as her subject, the Swiss-born, Düsseldorf-based Fries treats nature, like art, as a source of both marvelous creation and entropic decay.

She depicts the subjects of Merian’s book more in a physical than pictorial manner, with thickly built-up passages of paint on the surfaces of gessoed and silkscreened wood panels that mimic the textures and patterns—the striations, lattices, spindles and scales—of insect morphology. The quasi-sculptural elements of these panels, in vivid colors that suggest a butterfly’s wing, frequently abut or overlap without approaching harmonious integration. Indeed, although her work is about nature, Fries’s compositions evince no aspiration to organic unity. Their elements clash not only in color, texture and shape, but in the pictorial schemes they are drawn from, with heavy, globular abstract forms mirroring and elaborating the purely picto-



Kelli Williams: *Crown of Horns*, 2006, oil on panel, 18 by 48 inches; at Leo Koenig.

rial, black-and-white silkscreened images of Merian’s engravings.

Sometimes the works in “Loschaug” seem to simulate the actual body of an insect or plant; in other cases they suggest camouflage patterns. Still other compositions involve purely decorative designs abstracted from the natural world, as in *Palimpsest Surinam II* (2005), a silkscreened frieze based on palm leaves, or *Dover Book “Erucarum Ortus”* (2005), with its woven ribbons of paint. The only unifying strategy here is the arrangement of components, in such works as the large, four-part *Schwarze Blumen “Erucarum Ortus”* (2005), to suggest presentation in a display case or on an illuminated white table.

The combination of such different registers of representation may recall the fusion of painting, advertising imagery and newsprint in Rauschenberg’s silkscreened canvases. But whereas those earlier juxtapositions had a leveling, unifying effect, Fries emphasizes the contrast between Merian’s flat, seemingly objective scientific observations and the wildly expressive ends to which they are deployed. While the naturalists’ goal, typified by Merian, was to systematically catalogue an unimaginable level of biodiversity, Fries’s aim is to show that nature is always out of the reach of any snapshot representation or synthesizing account, whether proposed by science or art.

—Jonathan Gilmore

Kelli Williams at Leo Koenig

Kelli Williams applied a virtuosic hand to less-than-virtuous subject matter in her solo debut at Leo Koenig Inc. The artist’s meticulously rendered, modestly scaled paintings and drawings depict orgiastic scenes in which anything X-rated goes. Half-naked figures, some in soldiers’ or sports

uniforms, engage in all varieties of sexual activity: homosexual, heterosexual, from the front, from behind, with props and without, sadomasochistic and not. Fellatio and cunnilingus feature prominently, as does autoeroticism. Female bodies are often mutated so that the faces, breasts, genitalia and buttocks all face front (the men’s anatomy remains curiously intact), and creatures half-human, half-beast cavort in the democratic mix as well.

But the transgression doesn’t stop there. Williams strews upside-down crosses and dilapidated churches among dildos and phallic mushrooms. She assaults the American flag in *Crown of Horns* (2006) by repainting its stars as inverted pentagrams, recoloring its stripes, Jasper Johns-style, in fleshy pinks and spreading six provocatively posed, horned women across the front of it. The delicate pencil drawing *Rough Trade* (2006) is even edgier. Here, the World Trade Center’s twin towers erupt from the groins of a reclining, camo-clad soldier and a masturbating U.S. marine. One of the towers spurts ejaculate. The drawing isn’t exactly an indictment of our nation, but it does speak of our self-serving global domination and insinuates that all climaxes entail a subsequent fall.

Williams eloquently counters all this impropriety with an old-master realism reminiscent of Nicole Eisenman and the newly emerging Michael Ferris, Jr., both of whom also embrace the lascivious. The painstaking, tiny-brush application of paint results in surfaces that are physically thin yet lush in color, with every inch of the packed compositions exquisitely detailed. In the dark *Breeders’ Cup: Turf Classic* (2006), Williams fetishistically attends to each strand of hair, each fold and stitch in the jockeys’ silks and each wrinkle and shadow in the figures’ skin. This obsessive treat-

Pia Fries: *Schwarze Blumen “Erucarum Ortus,”* 2005, oil and silkscreen on wood panel, four parts, 94¼ by 267¼ inches overall; at CRG.



Copyright of Art in America is the property of Brant Publications, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.