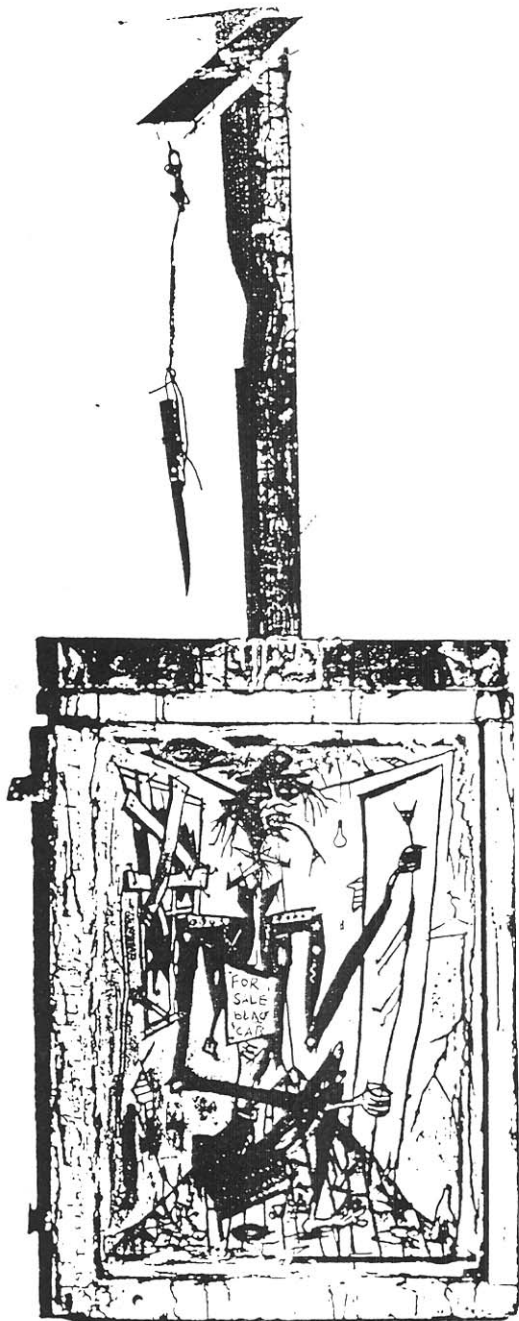


arts

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Rick Prol, *No Black Cats for Sale*. 1985.
Gouache and mixed media, 75 1/2 x 29
x 27. Courtesy Hal Bromm Gallery.

MAJOR WORKS

Luis Frangella's *Narcissus* (1985) tempts us to generalize on the "narcissism of postmodern art." But paint and subject are caught in a double bind: the brushstrokes blind Narcissus; he cannot gaze upon his reflection. So who is this? Paint also spills off the canvas onto the frame only to get into another bind. Off-canvas art (a kind of art world off-Broadway) here still longs for the old format with gilt frames, like an amputee who forever feels the lost limb. At 3:00 in the morning Frangella probably wants to splash this regressive Narcissus onto the back of Caravaggio's prototype hung facing a museum wall.

Roger Herman's *Fruits and Boots* (1984) brings the dropcloth, the splashy strokes, and even a pair of boots down from the housepainter's ladder into the tradition of fruit still life. Jobber painterliness is introduced to traditions of gilt-frame painting almost with shyness. Mike Bidlo's *Not Lichtenstein* denies the power of style and subject over paint in a similar way. The unframed canvas is the flag of the jobber's freedom.

The sculpture in this group show indicates more possibilities in off-canvas painting. When paint floods onto sculpture, it colors it, camouflages it, acts as a sealant, or animates it. Though each incursion endows paint with some new function, painters working on sculptural surfaces can generally be called "colorers" (as in the usage "coloring book"). Scott Richter's title, *Franks in Egypt* (1985), suggests a source for the torso at the top and the rounded granite rock at the bottom of this three-tiered totem pole: they post-modernize Egyptian sources. But the midsection and legs are painted with a gaudy yellow and black spot pattern that makes "leopard" spring to mind, a word which, connected to the torso above and set in an Egyptian aura, makes one think "sphinx." Coloring, by metamorphosis, conducts the totem into mystery. Seen next to Richter's "sphinx," Rick Prol's *Escape* seems more polarized, even sculptural. The division between diptych parts looks like an active metamorphic threshold. On one side a wolf animates framing jagged screens; on the other, it wears green polka dot pants. This pattern ricochets off Richter's "leopard."

Italo Scanga, in *Abstract Figure with Violin* (1984), covers a two figure sculpture in a color mosaic. Figure and color combine to make one figure similar to Picasso's theater costumes, but the other one is a delightful still-life collage. A pitchfork with a violin leaning against it suspends on its tip an upside-down toy elephant balancing a branch of rose thorns on its feet. Every inch of this witty assemblage is colored: it is the color that animates it and makes it work. Off-canvas coloring is almost magic. (Hal Bromm, *November 16-February 1*)