

ILONA SOCHYNSKY

A Journey into Abstraction

By Christina Saj

Every artist hopes to create a unique view of the world: Ilona Sochynsky has succeeded. An artist with an intensely personal vision, her work is strong and intriguing with haunting and obsessive images. Her paintings take on their most original, personal character when she juxtaposes realism and abstraction.

Her quiet and unassuming persona, particularly when discussing her own work, is



**Self-Portrait with
Hairbrush**
Oil on linen
38" x 26"
1982

not reflected in her paintings, which show strength of character and presence of mind. She reconstructs an inner reality in her pictures and invites the viewer to step into it. Over the last decade, Sochynsky's work has progressed from photo realism, through abstraction and elements of surrealism. The paintings are executed in a very clean, hard edge manner; the handling of oils is accomplished, with smooth-surfaced, uniform application.

Sochynsky's work belies the prejudice that painting is dead and that academic training hinders creativity. Her technical virtuosity and evocative images would be impossible without sound academic discipline and tradition.

Images collide, intertwine, abut, overshadow, obscure, and enhance each other. In her early work, *Self Portrait with Hairbrush* (1982) and *Petro in Space* (1983) for example, she places human figures and abstract objects in juxtaposition with often surprising, always arresting effect. With their air of vague unreality and myth, the objects depict the artist's attempt to amalgamate the animate and inanimate worlds. She contrasts softly molded flesh against the hard edged colors and contours in the background.

In her more recent painting, the narrative aspect is somewhat diffused by the further fragmentation of images and elimination of figures. More mysterious origins lend a haunting quality. Her work often feels pieced



Petro in Space
Oil on linen
38" x 26"
1983



Purple Glove
Oil on linen
48" x 48"
1986

together, not constructed on multiple planes. By altering levels of focus, by varying placement of



The Conversation

Oil on linen
24" x 20"
1987

the images, and by giving inanimate objects what she calls a symbolic "human attribute," Sochytsky replaces the human figures in her paintings with objects. A painting such as *Purple Glove* (1986) is a good example of this. Fragmentary glimpses of her reality give us perspective on a world which sometimes contains realistic space, sometimes imaginary space, and which includes the two on jagged and overlapping planes. Forms float and give off an eeriness that

redefines their purpose. The real world meets her world, and scale loses all sense of recognizable proportion. Shapes take on a meaning of their own, and the few literal images, like the glove, take on a new weight and significance.



Metropolitan Night

Oil on linen
14" x 12"
1990

Sochytsky alters levels of focus and placement of the images in *Conversation* (1987), where she has stripped her image to its bare essential. In capturing a specific moment in time, she makes generalizations and at the same time is very precise. She focuses on her principal image and reinforces its dominance by setting it on a dark dramatic background, while making its surroundings a blur of oncoming traffic. Yet, detail like dental molding on the building behind the figures is carefully considered. The figures are given precisely the

amount of gesture needed to indicate the moment of the conversation.

Her work is unified by the perpetual reference to figuration—one of the underlying thrusts in her paintings. Her journey is marked by the exploration of subject from a close vantage point which leads to further abstraction. This absorption with distance from her subject emerges as a study of particular moments in conjunction with jumbled images, much like one would imagine in a situation of simultaneous thoughts and events. The mind is given opportunity to sort these images and make new connections and interpretations.

In her most recent paintings, the remaining figurative images—without which the artist says she could not paint—have taken on a more stylized, flatter presence. In *Metropolitan Night* (1990) and *Landscape with a White Cloud* (1990), she creates less volumetric forms with a different treatment of light in the painting, so that the painting is less dramatic, more playful and elegant. Shapes emerge from one another without the forced cropping that was evident in earlier works—as though her shapes are finding their place.

No longer is there a sense of looking at pieces of things. The color is more felt to the particular occasion, not so brash. A cubist reference appears in her use of denser, flatter yet modelled geometric depiction. Her compositions are crammed with information, characters,



Landscape with White Cloud
Oil on linen
18" x 16"
1990

sometimes in slightly jarring relationships. Sometimes, there is the feeling of a colorful explosion. In *Kaleidoscope* (1991), there is a joy that is unleashed in this packed multi-textured painting.

The progression of her most recent series of paintings presents a repetition of simple recurring shapes—she is developing her own undeciphered mythology. ♦

[Christina Saj is an artist on the East Coast. She has an M.F.A. from the Milton Avery Graduate School of Fine Arts at Bard College and studied Art History at Wadham College, Oxford University.]



Kaleidoscope
Oil on linen
10" x 10"
1991

Iona Sochynsky

Education

Yale School of Art and Architecture, M.F.A., 1972
Rhode Island School of Design, B.F.A., 1969

Individual Shows

1992 Back Porch Cafe, Rehoboth Beach, Dela.
1991 Ukrainian Institute of America, New York, N.Y.
1991 TWG Gallery, Washington, D.C.
1989 Back Porch Cafe, Rehoboth Beach, Dela.
1988 Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, Chicago, Ill.
1984 Ukrainian Institute of America, New York, N.Y.

Selected Group Shows

1991 State Museum of Lviv, Lviv, Ukraine
1990 Styria Galleries Inc., Soho; Locust Valley, N.Y.
1990 Corporate Art Directions, New York, N.Y.
1987 Evergreen Gallery Inc., N.J.
1986 The Emerging Collector Gallery,
New York, N.Y.
1986 "Real Surreal", Olympia and York,
Park Ave Atrium
1985 Barbara Walter Gallery, New York, N.Y.
1985 New York City Partnership, Inc.,
New York, N.Y.
1984 Community Gallery, Brooklyn Museum
1983 Corporate Art Directions, New York, N.Y.
1983 Phyllis Weil & Company, New York, N.Y.
1982 Rhode Island School of Design, Alumni Biennial
Exhibition III, Woods Gerry Gallery
1982 Community Gallery, Brooklyn Museum
1981 Semaphore Gallery, New York, N.Y.