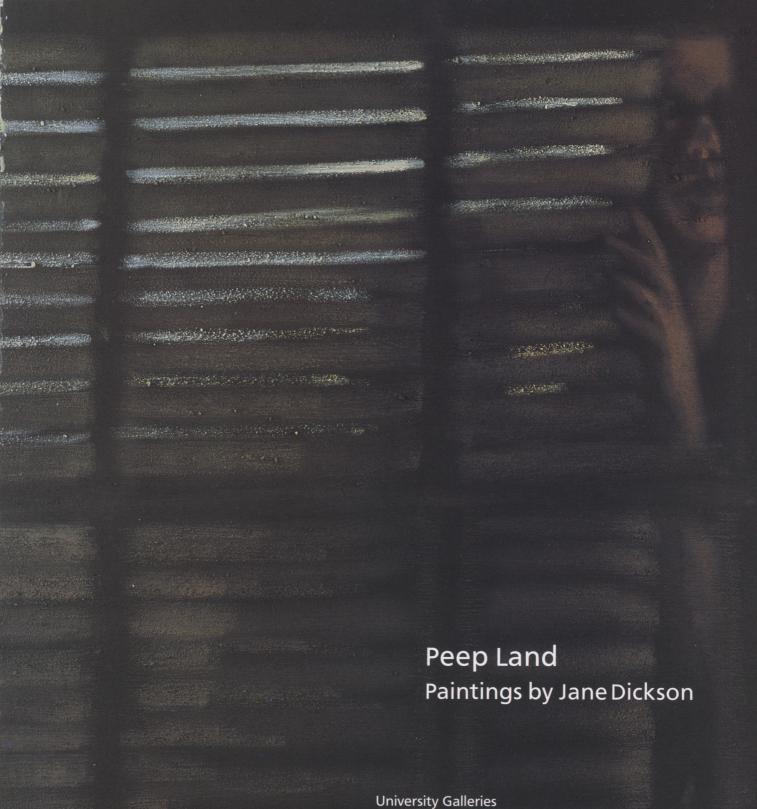
Péép Land Paintings by Jane Dickson



Illinois State University

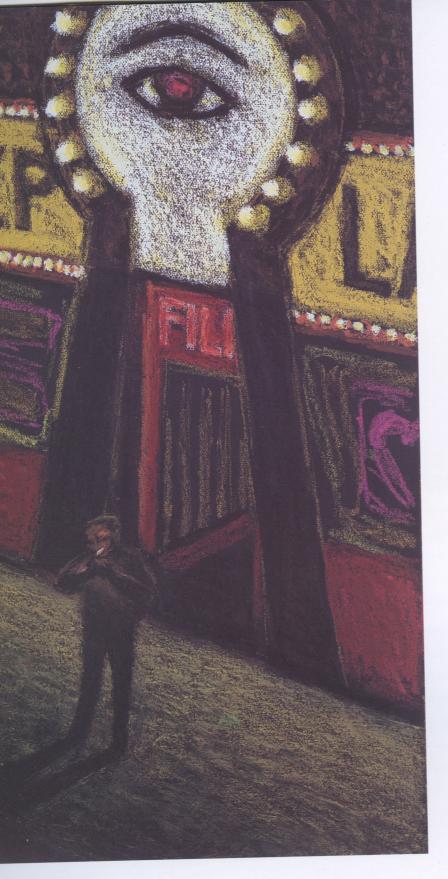
Normal, Illinois



Black Jack oil on canvas 50 x 70 inches 1987

Contents

- 4 Peep Show at the Magnetic Go-Go Pole Glenn O'Brien
- 10 Where the Wild Things Are Peter Schjeldahl
- 16 Color Plates
- **42 When Dawn Was Little...**Jennifer Kabat
- 46 Sex, Cars and Carnivals: a Conversation with Jane Dickson Barry Blinderman
- 58 Exhibitions and Bibliography
- 62 Works in the Exhibition
- 64 Credits



Peep Show at the Magnetic Go-Go Pole

Peep Land oilstick on black paper 30 x 17 inches 1984



BY GLENN O'BRIEN

THE HISTORY of modern representational painting is parallel to the history of the exploitation of the visible and electromagnetic spectra. Obviously painting was transformed by the invention of photography, but the impact of artificial lighting, the flicker of alternating current and the clash of fluorescent frequencies, though more elusive, may be as profound. The light of the world has changed forever.

The vibe has changed too. The human aura has been transmuted by the electromagnetic grid. Sensation and desire, like sound and light, are electronically transmitted and amplified. Time too has been altered profoundly as the ancient biorhythms of life have undergone an artificially stimulated electromagnetic mutation.

There are North and South poles, both geographical and magnetic, but there are other poles in this world. Times Square is a pole of animal magnetism. It's daylight at midnight. News flashes by on electronic signs as it happens in the streets. Porn is available for every appetite and inclination: magazines, films, peep shows, dancers. This is Times Square where time is squared, creating infinity in a hall of go-go joint mirrors. Fantasy is industry. Love is a hustle. Crime is a job. Priapism is endemic. Desires are contagious and so are their consequences.

People do live in Times Square, where the environment seems to have a high mutagenic potential. Jane Dickson lived there for many years and not only did she survive intact, she prospered. While most of the neighborhood's residents who are not directly involved in the "sex industry" or the drug trade might find it marginally bearable, a purgatory at best, Dickson found it a motherlode of subject matter.



BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Where the Wild Things Are

Pierrot oil on canvas 48 x 104 inches 1987

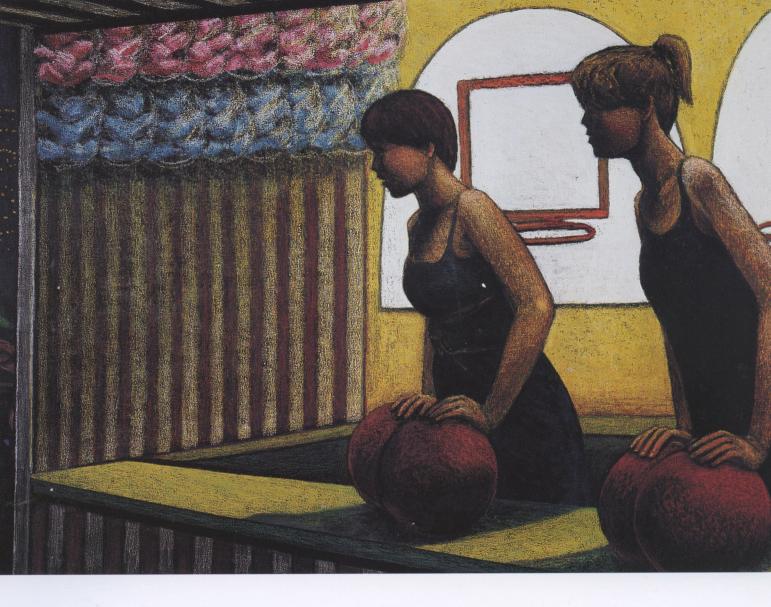


JANE DICKSON KNOWS THINGS. Special things. Odd particulars. Things pertaining to the United States in the late evening of the 20th century. They are wild things for the most part, though couched in a superficially reassuring art style. Dickson's style reassures in two ways. First, her generalized renderings and visible, often decorative technique can feel as familiar as popular music. She graces her figures with a speaking poetry of gesture and takes her decorative effects to nth degrees (as in painting on black grounds or in exaggerating the piquant roughness of canvas by substituting nubbly carpet material), but a viewer's cozy sense of being addressed in a visual common language remains. Second, Dickson's style has a fictional aura that promises carefree enjoyment of sensational subject matter. "Voyeuristic" is a word brought to mind by her window and bird's-eye views. "Cinematic" is another. The look of Dickson's pictures incites the delicious suspension of moral responsibility for which we still line up, money in hand, at movie theaters.

Dickson's art will seem least remarkable to people who have not lived very much. The more you know of life, the more you know that Jane Dickson knows things you don't. When I first saw her paintings of demolition derbies, I had never attended a demolition derby. (Incidentally, that was one of the most enchanting painting exhibitions of the 1980s, and one of the worst times in terms of fashion. In 1988 painting was dead again. No one knew what to do with the work, which passed in what seemed to be general torpor. When it is mentioned today, any number of New Yorkers will say—as if surprised to learn that anyone else saw it—"Oh yes, I loved that show!") Later I went to a derby in Upstate New York. It was a sophisticating experience.

A gloomily lighted, reeking, dirty ballet of noisy doom, the demolition derby is an American form of bullfighting in which the deft matador and the death-appointed bull are one—and one of many, in a democratic free-for-all. The cars seem alive, either as cartoonish creatures



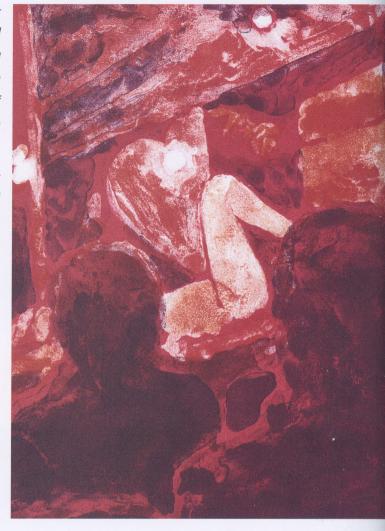


Frisking oilstick on canvas 90 x 40 inches 1983

U-Dunk-Em oilstick on canvas 64 x 100 inches 1984 Dawn climbed up on the hood of her daddy's Dodge Coronet wearing the white vinyl go-go boots her mother hadn't wanted to get her. But she had cried and pleaded—the most effective threats that an eight-year old has. Finally her mother broke down and

gave up her arguments that the boots were "inappropriate" and "too cheap-looking for a little girl." Dawn turned on the car's AM radio and started dancing, her arms writhing around her. She dreamed of the day when she could be one of the girls performing for men behind the windows of Eric's. The boots made her feel connected to the "go-go dancers" and "beautiful all nude girls" advertised there.

The windows at Eric's are boarded over, covered with mustard-yellow paneling, orangeing red velvet curtains and placards advertising the dancing hidden inside. As soon as Dawn saw the building she wanted to be there...



Untitled 5-color lithograph (r.t.p.) 10 x 8 inches co-published by Normal Editions Workshop and University Galleries 1994

When Dawn Was Little...

I'VE TOLD THIS STORY about Eric's Royal Palace so many times to please the men at work. I tell them about how I danced around at my parent's cocktail parties, pulling up my skirts for guests. I smile for them, explaining that while other girls my age thought of being ballerinas, my dreams of dancing took a different twist. It reassures them that I've always wanted to be a stripper, that I really want to take my clothes off for them, so they don't have to feel guilty.

"You certainly seem to enjoy stripping..." "Oh I do..."

I launch into the story another time. It becomes a line mechanically repeated ten times a night, fifty times a week. The words lose their meaning, separating from the fantasies behind them. The men slip into anonymity with each retelling. I don't remember very many, moving from table to table performing my moves, my smile, my story, trying to figure what each man wants and then fulfill his fantasy. He usually just gets my fantasy, my story, my groove. I feel like I have reached his when I get his adoration, his money and his approval.

"You're so great, so perfect, so sexy, so wonderful..."

I hear it over and over again. I feed off the attention. When I don't work for a few days, I start craving it again. The yearning begins in my gut, pulling me into a deep, hot darkness where sex, hands and desire grab at me. Eventually these feelings subside, but always return in time. I start needing men to look at me and feel pulled to disappear again—thrown blindly from one set of groping hands to another.

"What's a nice girl like you..., a smart girl like you doing?"

It's not an easy question to answer. Sometimes I work because I like it and sometimes for the money. Usually it's a combination of the two, getting off on guys giving me money for my body. My reasons aren't as simple as so-called feminists or my customers often think. Many feminists think that women in the sex industry are exploited victims who work only for the money, while the customers expect the dancer to be a "special sort of woman" who gets off on her job. My motivations are never clear cut, but rather full of the contradictions that stem from the taboos and expectations that surround

BY JENNIFER KABAT

Sex, Cars and Carnivals: a Conversation with Jane Dickson

BY BARRY BLINDERMAN

work that is both foreboding and evocative of the spiritual. This is especially evident in your newest paintings on carpet material, in which isolated nude figures are represented. On the one hand, you have someone who is naked and abandoned, dancing for the pleasure of men. But there's also something very ungraspable—their poses look sacrificial. In works of the early 80s such as Paradise Alley you showed us the façades of strip clubs. What led you to bring us inside?

touched on a decade earlier, when I was planning to move out of Times Square in 1992. It seemed important to address the heart of Times Square before I left. At first I was interested in being a spy in these places where a woman's only role is to be the naked object. What happens when a woman watches men stripping or other women stripping? Does the power shift? I chose to draw what I observed in oilstick on sandpaper; the creamy sensuousness of the oil on the abrasive surface echoed the seductive/repulsive push-pull of the experience. Then I spent some time in France, seeing churches full of old paintings of half-naked martyrs and saints. I looked half-

heartedly, thinking that they had nothing to do with my current work. But when I returned to New York, I felt compelled to buy long cheap carpet runners to paint the strippers on. They bring up references to the Shroud of Turin, to babies on bearskins, to video static ghosts, to cheap hotels. The strippers became contemporary saints, martyrs of the struggle between each fragile body and the world.

BB: This struggle would seem to relate to our quest for a more than superficial connection with our immediate and media-extended environments. A yearning for wholeness. We are trapped somewhere between being animals and angels, and I see that duality expressed in some of your work. You capture people engaged in a variety of specific activities that are often symbolic of seduction or gain. But nobody's ever going to get ahead playing three-card Monty, watching a stripper dance, or going on a carnival ride. As soon as the ride's over, the satisfaction wanes.

JD: You just want it again. I thought a lot about that when I made **Big Oval**—this ride that takes you up in a circle and then brings you down. On one level it's about yearning—attempting to transcend and ending up back where you started.

Green Garage

oilstick on canvas 66 x 74 ¹/₄ inches

1983

collection of Herbert and Hannah Halberg

Gem Liquors

oilstick on canvas 90 x 40 inches 1983

collection of Dr. and Mrs. Peter W. Broido

Paradise Alley

oilstick on canvas 90 x 40 inches 1983

the FORBES Magazine Collection, New York

Frisking

oilstick on canvas 90 x 40 inches 1983

collection of Michael and B.Z. Schwartz

Cold Beer

oilstick on canvas 63 ³/4 x 100 inches 1983 courtesy Brooke Alexander, New York

Shooting Gallery

oilstick on canvas 60 x 100 inches 1983 collection of Joan and Laurence Kleinman

Peep Land

oilstick on black paper 30 x 17 inches 1984 collection of Brooke and Carolyn Alexander,

collection of Brooke and Carolyn Alexander, New York

* Mother and Child

oilstick on linen 80 x 42 ¹/₂ 1985 collection of Charlie Ahearn

Study for Big Oval

oilstick on linen 50 x 30 inches 1985 collection of Chemical Bank

Striped Tent II

oilstick on canvas 64 x 100 inches 1986 collection of Dr. and Mrs. Peter W. Broido

Pierrot

oil on canvas 48 x 104 inches 1987

courtesy of Brooke Alexander, New York

Black Jack

oil on canvas 50 x 70 inches 1987

collection of Nat and Georgia Kramer

Baby

oil on canvas 50 x 70 inches 1987 courtesy Brooke Alexander, New York

Survival of the Fittest

oil on canvas 68 x 80 inches 1987-88 collection of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Levitt

* Reveler with Umbrella

oil on canvas 40 x 30 inches 1990 collection Carolyn and Brooke Alexander, New York

Reveler - Round Girl

oil on canvas

24 inches diameter 1990 collection of Joan Sonnabend, Obelisk Gallery, Boston

Reveler - Tooting Her Own Horn

oil on canvas 24 inches diameter 1990 collection of Mr. and Mrs. Troland S. Link

Reveler - Looking Back

oil on canvas
24 inches diameter
1990
collection of Fern McBride

* Trust Me I

oil on linen 31 1/2 inches diameter 1990 courtesy Brooke Alexander, New York

Trust Me II

oil on linen
31 1/2 inches diameter
1991
collection of Dana and Richard Neuman

* Mounted Police III

oil on canvas 70 x 35 inches 1991 courtesy of Brooke Alexander, New York

Witness (J.A.)

oil and Roll-A-Tex on canvas 70 x 35 inches 1991

collection of Paine Webber Group Inc., New York

Witness (C.F.)

oil and Roll-A-Tex on canvas 70 x 35 inches 1991 collection of Philip Dapeer

Witness (B.E.)

oil and Roll-A-Tex on canvas 70 x 35 inches 1991 courtesy of Brooke Alexander, New York

Chippendales

oil and Roll-A-Tex on canvas 69 x 123 inches 1993 courtesy Brooke Alexander, New York

* Melody Burlesque I

oil and Roll-A-Tex on canvas 75 x 40 inches 1993 courtesy Brooke Alexander, New York

Melody Burlesque II

oil and Roll-A-Tex on canvas 75 x 40 inches 1993 courtesy Brooke Alexander, New York

Red Shadow

acrylic medium and oil on carpet 72 x 27 inches 1993 courtesy of Brooke Alexander, New York

Red Shadow II

acrylic medium and oil on carpet 27 x 72 inches 1993 courtesy Brooke Alexander, New York

Blue Shadow

acrylic medium and oil on carpet 84 x 27 inches, each of two 1993 courtesy Brooke Alexander, New York

Credits

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©1994 Peter Schjeldahl, "Where the Wild Things Are"

©1994 Jennifer Kabat, "When Dawn Was Little..."

©1994 Barry Blinderman, "Sex, Cars and Carnivals:a Conversation with Jane Dickson"

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John Abbott: 18, 20, 24, 54. Lisa Kahane: 25 right, 59. Maggie Hopp: 25 left.

Charlie Ahearn: 45, 50, 58. Debra Risberg: 19, 23. Ivan Dalla Tana: 36.

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Herald of the New Order, collection of Richard and Dana Neuman
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Mud Dog, collection of Swiss Bank Corporation, NYC
Hotel Girl, collection of Martin Sklar
U-Dunk-Em, collection of Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC
Revelers-Herald and Couple, collection of Proskauer, Rose, Goetz & Mendelson, NYC
White-Haired Girl, collection of Pierre Gailloud, Kuesnacht, Switzerland

front cover: Red Shadow I (detail) frontispiece: detail of Witness (B. E.) back cover: Baby (detail)

above: Trust Me II



ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY



Speaking with the grace of an angel—without judgement or cynicism, with absolute acceptance of reality without need to glamorize or abstract.

Her gritty paintings are specific narratives of American obsessions while alluding to the modern human condition—the struggle to survive and maintain humanity against the unreality of the urban landscape.

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