



Charles Burwell:
Interior, Interior, 2010,
oil on canvas,
52 by 40 inches;
at Bridgette Mayer.



Kathryn Refi:
President Gerald Ford Greet Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in Florida, 2010, charcoal on paper, 41½ by 53½ inches; at Solomon Projects.

attributes. *Taken* presents a haircut as fairy tale. A free-floating pair of scissors snips a lock from the head of a girl whose warm brown skin stands out against the turquoise ground. In the air behind hangs a large green cabbage whose precise meaning cannot be defined.

The larger works are both more ambitious and more complete; the girls play in the surf on a beach, squat in patches of cabbages and shoes, or kneel to peer through the broken ice of a frozen pond. In *Sweet Dreams*, two girls seen from above lounge near an almost phallic three-tiered tower of cupcakes; milk has spilt from the overturned cup in one of the girl's hands. Here the subtle eroticism is unlike the knowing voyeurism of Balthus, or the aggressive sexuality of Marlene Dumas's figures; these girls are seemingly unaware of the sensuality they radiate. Trailing floral vines that intrude from the edge of the picture undermine any sense of naturalism, forcing the viewer to recognize in the work a world of symbols as well as subjects.

The intensity with which Williamson forms the small objects in the paintings further emphasizes their symbolic quality. Nothing is painted with more attention than the cupcakes and milk bottles, the cabbages and shoes, the props which are the show's leitmotifs. The girls themselves are stiff by comparison, strangely static, despite their contorted postures. Atmosphere outweighs specific meaning.

In *Garden Gift*, two girls crouch above a pile of shoes and cabbages in the foreground. Behind them a third girl, perhaps intruding on the scene, is painted with

uncharacteristic looseness. It's a glimpse of how a freer handling of the paint might have given a very different impression.

—Tadzio Koelb

PHILADELPHIA CHARLES BURWELL BRIDGETTE MAYER

In this show of nine recent paintings, "Structuring Desire/Desiring Structure," Charles Burwell offered no quiet moments. The title suggests a mind comfortable with systems of order, such as those found in math and science. But Burwell's visual world, which comprises overlapping shapes and striated hues, is brilliant and delightful. While we think of scientific investigations as somber and labored, Burwell's abstract structures, replete with optical effects, dazzle the eye, prompting viewers to check and recheck what they see. An untitled work from 2010, for example, features the interplay of blue stripes against a burnt-orange ground, with flashes of white where the colors intersect. Rather than hitting you over the head, the artist presents a fleeting gestalt, a sleight of hand.

A magician with secondary and tertiary colors, Burwell creates highly patterned surfaces involving layers and layers of paint. The second or third layer serves as background for crisply defined forms—lines, clover shapes, circles and semicircles that often converge. Yet elements such as a totemic rectangular monolith, rendered in burnt orange on a viridian field in *Distant Key* (2010), exemplify his deviation from standard design vocabulary.

Burwell, who earned an MFA at Yale in 1979, is one of a cluster of artists, including Jim Lambie and Odili Donald Odita, who combine lessons learned from Color Field, Op art and pattern painting of the 1970s. And, yes, the immediacy of Pop art is evoked as well. These artists all share a strong measure of chromophilia.

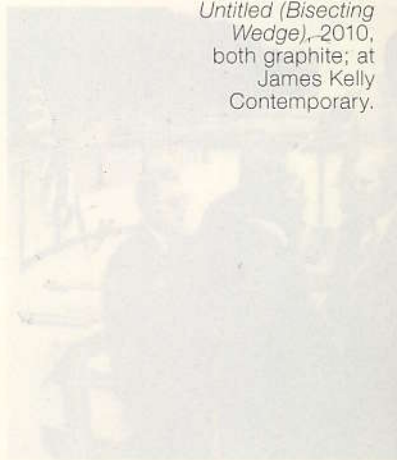
Despite his use of geometric forms and design principles, Burwell never loses the visceral intensity of gesture. Looping colored stripes and concentric circles convey movement that is simultaneously fluid and controlled. Snippets of various shapes collide as in a vortex. The key work in the exhibition, *Interior, Interior* (2010), evokes the possibility of ontological states—the varied landscapes within us—corresponding to the spatial relationships in the painting. "Structuring Desire/Desiring Structure" had an intensity of spirit that could be felt; its overriding message was the sheer joy and lyricism of painting.

—A.M. Weaver

ATLANTA KATHRYN REFI SOLOMON PROJECTS

Kathryn Refi uses her artistic practice to examine how she fits into the world. Like On Kawara, she tracks her existence via a set of predetermined parameters, creating artworks that fit within self-imposed limits. Previously she has measured her daily movements with a light meter, à la Spencer Finch, and used the data to create abstract paintings. For this new body of work, all completed in 2010, the Athens, Ga.-based artist developed three projects centered around the date of her birth.

View of Susan York's exhibition, showing *Corner Column*, 2008, and *Untitled (Bisecting Wedge)*, 2010, both graphite; at James Kelly Contemporary.



In *The Days of My Life* (Nov. 2nd, 1975 through Nov. 2nd, 2010), Refi methodically inked in one tiny square of a tightly drawn 22-square-inch grid for every day she had been alive from the day she was born until the opening of the show, which was held on her 35th birthday. Cycling through seven colors (green, pink, yellow, blue, brown, purple and orange)—one for each day of the week—resulted in a bold, rippling geometric pattern.

She also exhibited 34 spare graphite-on-paper drawings. Refi placed a sheet of 10-by-12-inch paper over each *New York Times* crossword puzzle published on Nov. 2 from 1975 through 2010, and solved as much of the puzzle as she could. Some are quite complete, others have large empty spaces. One work is completely blank, due to a printer's strike in 1978. Installed chronologically in a grid, *My Solution to the November 2nd New York Times Crossword Puzzle* is an exploration in mark-making, which results in text-based patterns that vary in density.

These two works created the conceptual foundation for the photo-based series in the main gallery. Scrolling through microfiche and the Internet, the artist selected seven photographic illustrations published on the day of her birth. They range from the historically important, such as *President Gerald Ford Greets Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in Florida* or *Film Director Pier Paolo Pasolini is Murdered*, to the more trivial, like *Chris Holl Poses with Dr. Lewis' Lamborghini Miura*. She also included a post-birth hospital picture of herself. Refi redrew each of the photographs in charcoal (if the original

was black-and-white) or pastel (if it was color). Her incredibly rich depictions are not photo-realist copies; they're more expressionistic, imbuing the image with an emotional, first-person quality. In fact, some of the drawings have more detail than their degraded microfiche predecessors. The eight-part series is like a self-portrait that encompasses historical events, bringing them back to life with a personal twist.

—Rebecca Dimling Cochran

MIAMI CLIFTON CHILDREE DORSCH

In a trio of installations (all 2010) at the Dorsch Gallery in Wynwood, Clifton Childree led us along a carnival midway of the past, celebrating oddities, eccentricities and showmen. The assembled environments produced full sensory experiences and included two- and three-dimensional visual imagery, text, music, sound, black-and-white silent movies and even a faintly musty smell.

At the center of each tableau stood, or tilted precariously, a bizarre piece of furniture, built from found materials—old breakfronts, china cabinets, wardrobes—with a moving image inside it. Childree shoots 16mm film, using stop-motion animation and hand coloring; he scratches, draws and writes titles on the film, and transfers the results to DVD, which he then presents on flat-screen monitors mounted inside the furniture. "I'm an analog artist in a digital world," he says (all artist's quotations from an interview with gallerist Tyler Emerson-Dorsch). The settings

are completed with vintage rugs and pictures, antique postcards and objects significant to the narratives.

The themes of all three installations spring from Childree's identification with the lives and dreams of dead composers: Scott Joplin, the American ragtime pianist who played in bordellos and went mad from the effects of late syphilis, finally dying after falling off the chair in which he habitually sat and played "air piano"; Alexander Scriabin, the Russian who developed a theory of an ultimate synthesis of all the arts for the sake of inducing states of mystic rapture and who died after a picked scab on his lip led to a fatal infection; and Richard Wagner, whose patron, King Ludwig of Bavaria, is the subject of the third piece. Childree uses fragments of Wagner's compositions as "movie music" for the film component of the installation *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which the artist appears, nude, in a bawdy enactment of the madness and murder of Ludwig. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a form seems close to Childree's aspiration too, except that his genre is melodrama—that late 19th-century emotionally exaggerated type of theater usually accompanied by music, adopted by the early silent moviemakers, which so easily slides into slapstick. In his presentation of the tragic deaths of his subjects, Childree characteristically finds an element of comedy, affectionately mocking their ambitious delusions. "I like madness," he notes.

Childree appreciates the look of the antique, the handmade. When he was a child, his musician mother gave him