

Art in America

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Mary Frank at DC Moore

Mary Frank, an artist ever renewing herself, combines an earthy, hands-on approach to materials with a keen awareness of the potentiality of chaos, accident and chance. Her recent exhibition of 29 figurative works included paintings, mixed-medium collages, monoprints, a pastel and *Landscape Woman*. There was also a commanding new bronze casting in eight sections of a more than 8-foot-long reclining figure made from an original ceramic version that was created in 1973-74. (All works discussed here are from 2005.)

The most haunting image is *Portrait of Milton Resnick*, a 22-by-30-inch mixed-medium collage. Frank transformed her oil-and-acrylic painting on paper of the late artist, modeled in blue-gray washes and grayed-down whites, by turning it sideways and masking half of the face with a paper stencil of one of her quintessential leaping horses. While sifting through old work, Frank came across stencils that she had used for years making monoprints and discovered that she could recycle the stencils themselves to frame painted images. In this instance, the paper around the cutout portion of the stencil has been painted pitch black; its torn white edges stand out against the brushy background of the underlying painting and create the illusion of looking out of a window into deep space. The horse/portrait seems suspended in the midnight sky, set free of earthly constraints.

The exhibition included a handsome grouping of three monoprints and one pastel from the "Sleeper Awake" series, numbers *I*, *III*, *IV*, and *VI* (all roughly 22 by 30 inches). While each is a variation



Mary Frank: *Sleeper Awake*, 2005, oil, acrylic and collage on board, 49% by 51 1/2 inches; at DC Moore.

on a larger painting also in the show, all four repeat the flat shape of a crouching woman seen in profile from a high vantage point, with knee and arm pulled in toward each other,

leg cropped at the ankle. She hugs the ground, her hands in a gathering gesture; the hand closest to the viewer caresses the earth while the opposite hand rests palm-up with gently curving fingers. Scattered across the landscape of the figure, mazelike ruins drawn in perspective suggest dreams of lost civilizations. The monoprint *III* is unusual in that the woman holds an upright green leaf twice the size of her head and delicately drawn on translucent *chine collée*. The figure is gray against a white background, while in the other two monotypes and single pastel, the body is white against varying backgrounds. Soft sea-

green lines of plowed fields give a lushness to *VI*. Reddish and ochre-hued browns lend a parched feel to *IV*. Only in *I*, the pastel, does the figure straddle a horizon line where stormy gray sky meets terracotta earth.

These more contained works and some of the other mixed-medium collages, such as *Memory of a Town* and *Canyon*, are a departure from paintings such as the emotive and wild *In the Air*, a 47-by-54-inch oil on board peopled with collaged figures who leap and soar as if caught up in a whirlwind. The exhibition showed Frank's great range—an improvisatory approach characterized by her uncanny ability to transform base matter into spirit.

—Elisa Decker