

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Smith, Roberta. "Richard Prince." The New York Times. 1990.

rary and Western are also quintessentially Japanese: foremost is its obvious faith in the power of beautiful materials handled simply but creatively and in unexpected ways. In the end, her effort shifts quietly into the category of art by simply concentrating on the facts of craft with unusual intensity. This is one of the strongest works of Japanese art to be shown in New York in some time and another feather in the cap of the Modern's "Projects" program.

Kyoko Kumai's "Air" remains at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53d Street, through June 18. It will not travel.

Richard Prince

Barbara Gladstone
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Through tomorrow

Richard Prince, well known for his photographic work, is transferring his examinations of American culture to painting. Throughout the 80's, he grouped similar photographs of fashion models, customized cars or bikers' girlfriends; these works, which the artist called "gangs," isolated various urban obsessions and subcultures. Now Mr. Prince is layering and juxtaposing New Yorker-style cartoons and jokes as if they were brushstrokes, allowing them to fade in and out of legibility through the use of lots of thin white paint. These paintings, which are also "gangs" of sorts, are elegant and intriguing, if somewhat flawed.

Formally, they seem to comment

on the bankrupt state of painting and its need for new, lowbrow blood, although they do so in a rather unoriginal manner. They owe a large debt to the silk-screen paintings of both Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. But they're more on their own in terms of meaning and a peculiarly bitter yet vulnerable emotional tone.

In characteristic Prince fashion, these new paintings focus on a particular group, in this case the city sophisticate, by cataloguing the cartoonist's shorthand imagery. They are full of French windows overlooking city skylines, coffee tables where martinis await the weary, bookcases and lamps, framed paintings and patterned wallpaper — all sketched in with deft savoir faire. With these props, which spell "New York apartment" loud and clear, several generations of New Yorker cartoonists have set the scene for some mordant putdown or retort, some humorous little tragedy.

In one work, these elements spin about as if being viewed through a liquor-induced haze, but everywhere there is a sense that the artist's true subjects are alcoholism, loneliness and relationships gone awry. These suspicions are encouraged by the appearance of a hanged man in one painting and also by the repeated use of a tiny Playboy Bunny logo whose head has been transformed into a human skull.

Mr. Prince has toyed with paint and canvas for some time, but increasingly he seems to be giving himself permission to explore the physical possibilities of the medium. So doing, he announces a whole new ballgame for his art, with a first inning that is off to a good start.