

## An Artist Goes Home Again in Her Work

Yuling Huang

When Jan Zelfer-Redmond first entered college at the end of the sixties, the eclecticism of conceptualism was spreading in the art world. Nearly 25 years later, Zelfer-Redmond fulfills her dream—studies of art and conceptual art, an art that emphasizes concepts instead of medium or style, that has eventually emerged in her work. Zelfer-Redmond received her BFA in painting from University of South Dakota in 1995.

The drawings and paintings in the current exhibition *Codeswitching* at Joseph Nease Gallery, were executed in a period from 1996 to 1999. In these works, the artist pays homage to her love of conceptual art and the land of South Dakota where she grew up.

The drawings are an immediate reference to the conceptual, an art that employs a wide range of forms particularly language, abstract symbols and signs, which demand a more active participation from its audience. In three drawings, Zelfer-Redmond utilizes plus and minus signs both as mathematics symbols as well as metaphors of "positiveness" and "negativeness." Instead of mixing them, she juxtaposes the groups of plus and minus signs in a confrontational gesture. Two other drawings herald the repetitive appearance of numbers one to five in her paintings. The idea of five is manifested in a variety of configurations, as a sequence, codes, a sentence of five words, time, morning and night, and as counting marks. Zelfer-Redmond prefers odd numbers and 3 is a number she likes to combine with 5 in the space of her canvases for their abundant implications. Zelfer-Redmond practices the numbers as if a ritual of their daily writing evokes many unique yet monotonous moments of everyday life. The incorporation of numbers, num-



Linn 4, oil on canvas by Jan Zelfer-Redmond at Joseph Nease Gallery

bers, dots, subconscious writing and scratching marks, and symbols are her synthetic nod to the influence of post-minimalist and conceptual artists such as Joseph Kosuth, Mel Bochner, Merce Cunningham, Hanne Darboven, to name a few.

In the painting *Linn 1*, several series of numbers one to five written in sequence occupy the right section of the

painting, while the left section, a net-like scientific diagram of chromosomes, a frequently recurring theme in her paintings, crosses from top to bottom. Zelfer-Redmond is enthralled by the subject of genetic code and how DNA and RNA work in the process of transcription and translation of hereditary information from genes into proteins which create and develop various traits.

is constantly interpreted and exchanged from concrete geometric dots to the deepest amorphous thoughts. The artist is intrigued by the process of codes switching, the transferring and translating of one code to the other. *Codeswitching* regardless of forms, either the chemical sequencing of a chromosome, the interpretation of one linguistic system to another, or the bor-

The combination of numbers and the image of chromosomes also reveal her fascination with how a particular number of chromosomes could cause a certain disease. In *Linn 1*, the scientific diagram of chromosome is transferred into an artistic image and represents both a scientific language and a visual one.

*Basic Training I* and *Basic Training II* inspired by Braille, were done as a result of a personal encounter with the blind and are also a reference to the many dotted pieces by conceptual artist Mel Bochner.

The spontaneous and free flowing lines traverse the dotted canvas like scripts of subconscious writing without their alphabets. They hint at the conversation between the hands and the mind. The code

rowing of scientific diagrams for use as visual form, and the expression of oneself through art to an audience, all create an immense uncertainty and mutability.

The reiterated numbers of one to five, the subconsciously drawn lines, and various geometric shapes are continued in the *Untitled (gray, blue, orange)*. Contrasted to usually colorless conceptual work, Zelfer-Redmond's subdued yet saturated coloration humanizes and personalizes abstract dots and lifeless numbers. Growing up in the Badlands of South Dakota, she spent her adolescent years among the gray and bluish coloring of the land. Though imbued with seemingly lifeless colors, she discovers the dynamic and vibrant energy from the soils and the earth. Underneath many of the mellow surface colorations of her paintings is an affluent texture fabricated by various saturated lines, melodic and undulated, bursting with energy and sustained with duration striving to emerge to the surface. In *Untitled (gray, blue, orange)*, the arid soils of her home are transformed into a graceful salmon-colored illusory land of gray mixed with patches of yellow, red, and black. This beautiful coloration reappears in *Linn 5* in which more geometric shapes and organic drawings contribute a playful quality to the work.

A degree in English and sociology before gaining her BFA, prompted her wide interest in various subjects and the poetic exploration of her themes. In the *Untitled (green triptych)*, She experiments with the integration of the western and eastern religious thoughts and symbolism. On top of each triptych, she draws symbols of a cross, a triangle, and a circle in a different consecution. The placement of the symbols in the vertical is reminiscent of some eastern paintings of *Zen* and the segregated area at the bottom of each triptych investigates the ideas of boundaries.

*Codeswitching* is a show in which the artist pays homage to her youth, the artistic expression of the conceptual art she saw when she was a young college student and the nostalgia for her home. It is a well organized exhibition in a comfortable and intimate gallery space that is worthy of a visit.

## Former Junk, Modern Light, Future Vision

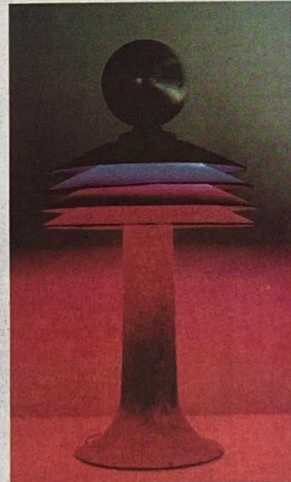
Ed Frazier

Stroll past Millenium Glass some evening between now and the end of April and you can see how Chris Mann spends his days. Vertical, cylindrical constructions of scrap metal and neon stand as glowing centurions against the darkness of the gallery district. It's an impressive sight, and it represents the most recent work of an artist torn between his newfound passion for junk and a life-long love of the Jetsons.

Millenium Twilights, which opened in January, stands as a testament to an artistic evolution which emerged as much from a point of inspiration as a matter of necessity. After several years of working as a traditional glass artist, Mann began casting glass against textured steel. But when a falling out with the owner of the glass shop suddenly left him without a steady glass source, he began to look in other directions. It was also around this time that he began doing commercial neon work.

"Without access to the glass, I started looking at the steel not so much as textures I could cast against but as texture in itself, looking at the steel for what it was. And of course neon became very easy to incorporate.

"This whole series is basically try-



Plutonian Prizm

ing to make the futuristic lamp in the Jetson style. That was an influence when I was a kid. It's about taking the past and the present and making it look to the future."

One element that is repeated in almost every piece is the use of cultivating discs of various sizes.

"It was a piece of steel that I really

liked. It was a shape, a form, and I was wondering what I could do with it, how could I utilize it."

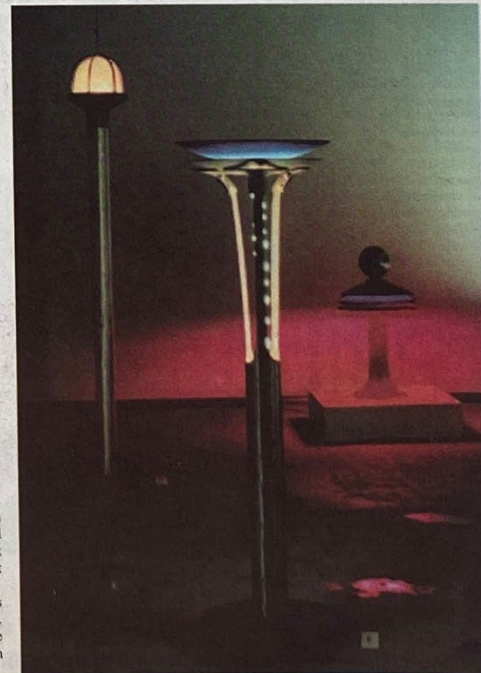
What he did was incorporate the discs into the pieces horizontally. By laying them flat, they serve to disperse the light out away from the piece while remaining symmetrical to the vertical axis of each lamp. For Mann, this symmetry creates a certain order and allows the pieces to stand, as he says, "like humans against gravity."

Mann also incorporates gears and brake discs in this vertical merging of agri-industrial elements and a futuristic vision. In one corner of his studio, there's a sizable collection of springs, pipes and other metal scraps which constitute Mann's "steel yard indoors."

"Components, odds and ends. That's how I work. Like a kid playing with Lego blocks. You build something, you look at it, you don't like certain parts, so you rearrange it till something strikes you."

Yes, just like Legos, the Jetsons and the possibilities of what could be.

Millenium Twilights runs until the end of April. Millenium Gallery is open Saturdays 12-4 or by appointment.



Futuristic Incommunicato, Trypostic Futura, Plutonian Prizm