



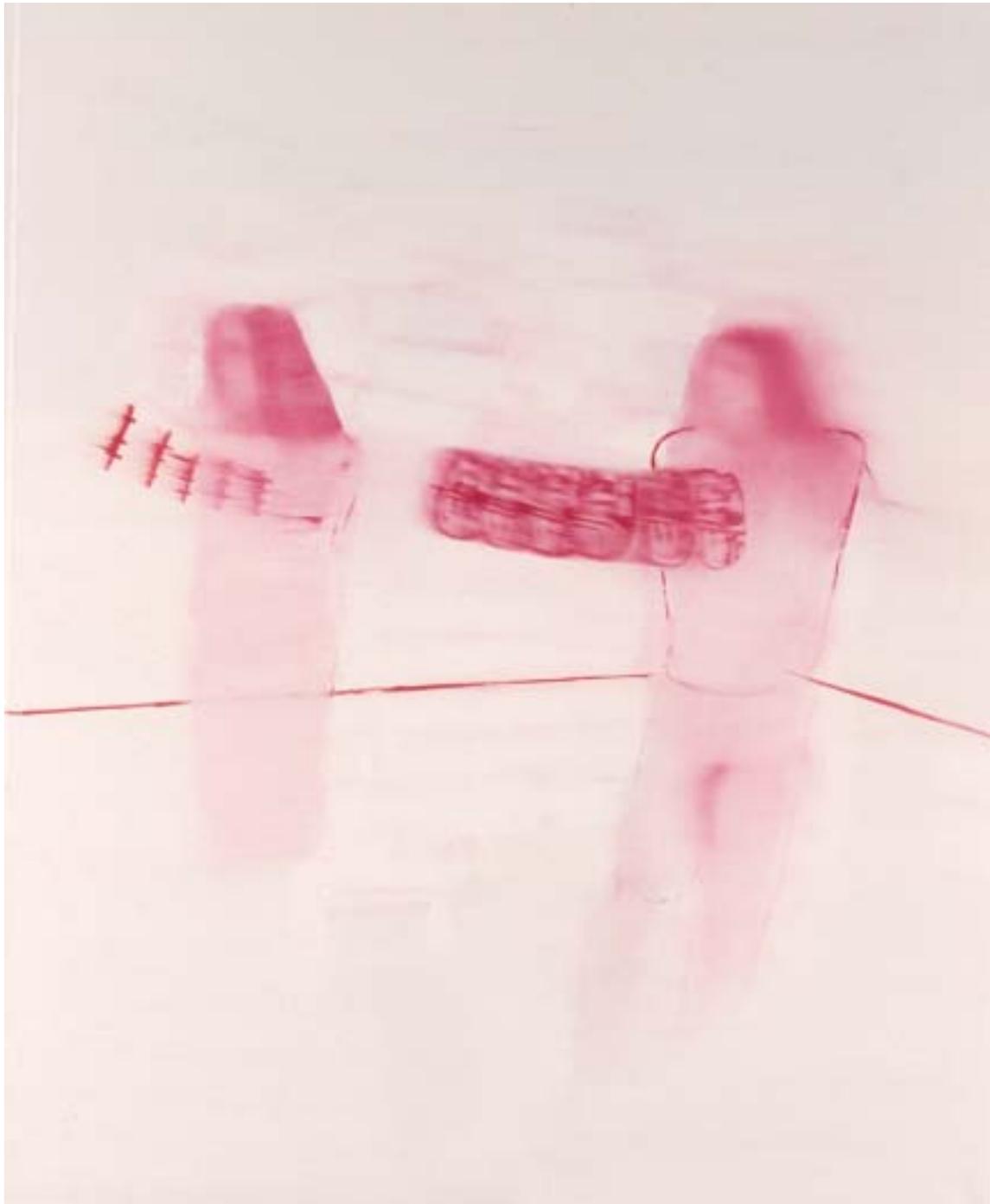
Leemour Pelli

Paintings and Drawings



Act with Words, 2003 - oil on canvas, 70" x 54"

Cover: Lingering Dissolution, 2003 - oil on canvas, 48" x 36"



Surface Perception I, 2003 - oil on canvas, 60" x 48"

Leemour Pelli

Paintings and Drawings

University of Central Florida Art Gallery
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Mirror Mirror on the Wall, 2002 - oil on canvas, 70" x 54"

Leemour Pelli: Paintings & Drawings

"The subject matter of my work is the investigation of internal and external forms of perception, and to portray reality and the nature of the self from various perspectives."

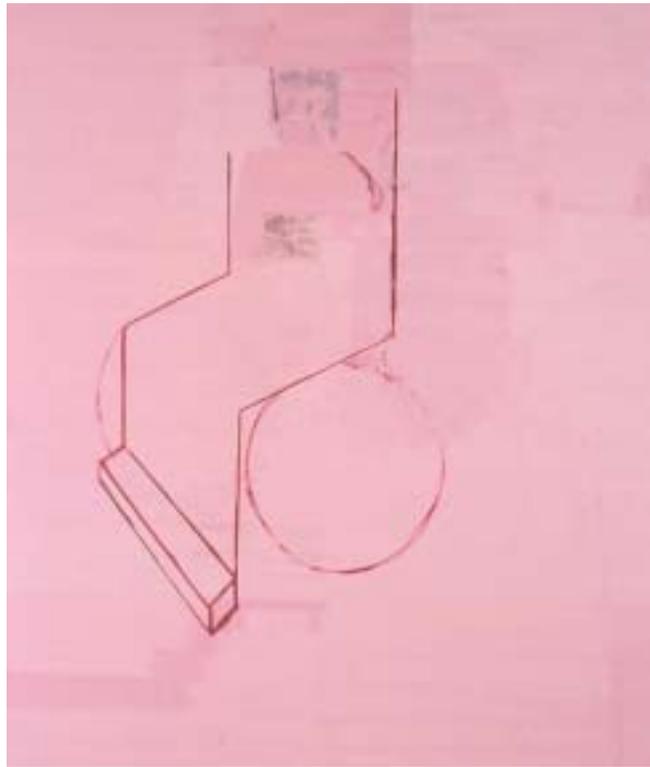
-Leemour Pelli

This exhibition presents a comprehensive view of work by New York artist, Leemour Pelli. It is the artist's first solo exhibition in Florida and includes works created between 1998 and 2003. The UCF Art Gallery is delighted to be among the many venues that have exhibited her work which include the PS1 Institute of Contemporary Art in Long Island City, New York, the Stephen Stux Gallery, Nikolai Fine Art, and Reddot Gallery in New York, The Whitney Museum of Art in Champion, Connecticut, Artcore Gallery in Toronto, and the Gallery of South Orange, in New Jersey.

The UCF Art Gallery is pleased to present this exhibition for the education and enjoyment of the UCF students and Central Florida community. In curating the exhibition, I have emphasized new works, but have included some of the artist's earlier pieces that I felt would put into context the direction her work is taking today. Pelli focuses mostly on the human figure and the human condition in a complex reality. At times, her work is influenced by literature, particularly the work of Samuel Beckett. According to the artist, her figures are "studies of the nature of the self in relation to various social, psychological, visual and emotional states, whether real or imagined."

This exhibition would not be possible without the significant assistance and support of many dedicated people. I wish to thank Leemour Pelli for the generous loan of her work, and David Gibson, an independent curator and critic in New York, for contributing his catalogue essay. Our sincerest thanks are also extended to Orlando philanthropists Barry Miller, Esquire, and Phil Rampy of Olde Town Brokers, Inc., for sponsoring this catalogue. I would also like to thank Janet Kilbride (the Art Gallery's Programs Coordinator and Registrar) for her assistance in organizing the exhibition and related programs, Siglinde Quirk, UCF Office of Instructional Resources, who designed the catalogue and photographer Christopher Carone for his photography of the works. I want to extend a very special acknowledgment and thank you to the collectors who lent works to the show, Kathryn O'Donnell, New York City, and Phil Rampy, Orlando.

Kevin Haran
Gallery Director



*Handicapped, 2000 - oil, manipulated transfers on canvas,
60" x 48"*

LEEMOUR PELLI | Paintings & Drawings

ESSAY BY DAVID GIBSON

The aesthetic and formal accomplishments of Leemour Pelli, which are maintained alternately through the activities of painting and drawing, accrue in their degree of portent as they develop her subject matter—an extended treatise on the irreconcilable workings of the heart. Pelli is dedicated to using the human figure as a scale for gauging human drama, and her work springs from an interest in the aesthetic interstices of linguistic and pictorial inspiration. It is at once an investigation of the issues of her own life—which deal mainly with pain, loneliness, and memory; longing, solitude, and desire, and with matters of formal craft. Despite its strong emotional tenor, it should be viewed as an alternating cycle of interpretations. Just as a writer may revise characters from one book to the next, so Pelli reinterprets her characters, the world they live in, and the terms of their thematic reception. Pelli's work possesses a dynamic emotional charge which, along with her use of the figure as both character and totem, forges an unseen emotional narrative beyond the appearance of any particular person, place, or event. Through its very evident sense of mystery it challenges our acceptance of what constitutes reality.

Leemour Pelli began as a poet, and it was her love of literature that sprang into a desire to create art works which transcend the boundaries of literary inspiration. Early on, she was attracted to all manner of amorous and romantic literature, reading such writers as Rimbaud, Chateaubriand,

Artaud, Constant, etc. which infused her imagination with the dynamic of human relations. Her purview soon attached itself to the writings of the Surrealists, such as Breton, Aragon, and Lautreamont, and later, particularly to the Absurdist plays and novels of Samuel Beckett. As an individual thoroughly convinced of her uniqueness in idiosyncrasy, both out of place and out of time, Pelli found an immediate affinity for a literature which placed a higher value in interior reality and the transformation of the mundane into the sublime. Her reading of such authors whose insistence (whether by the demands of narrative or character) that life is absurd—aided her in her progression of a specific set of pictorially symbolic values that have only grown more dynamic and informed in their accrual. However, it is from Beckett himself that she draws the widest expanse of emotional inquiry. Several of her titles are drawn from his novel *Murphy* which relates, in his typically idiosyncratic prose, the story of two men whose hearts work differently, but who both bear a love for the same woman. Murphy is prone to emotional extremes, with "such an irrational heart that no physician could get to the root of it," and he is for good reason the center of the novel. Neary, on the other hand, is described as a man who "could stop his heart more or less whenever he liked and keep it stopped, within reasonable limits, for as long as he liked." Pelli does not attempt to overtly narrate distinct scenes from *Murphy*, but instead takes an intrinsic view of the pure



To Murphy II, 2002 - Pencil, oil, manipulated transfer on paper, 50" x 38"

psychological and idiosyncratic elements of the story involving Murphy and Neary. She samples the mood and depth of the novel's characterization without borrowing from the thread of expository narrative, preferring instead to rely upon its degree of personification and myriad eventfulness.

From this idea of the differing hearts and emotional extremes, Pelli has created, among others, a dual set of images which operate as either complementary views of the same condition, as depictive foils, or both. In *To Murphy I* and *To Murphy II* (both 2002) we are presented with a single persona in alternating afflictions relating to the human ability to aptly communicate emotions and their relationship to innate identity. Each large drawing is dominated by a wash of color, and a body and face outlined by pictorial dimness, yet they are both stirred by emotional redolence. The main dramatic qualities are their manner of facial expression, and the specifically painted imagery of their individually dramatized afflictions. In *To Murphy I*, there are scars, and wide gashes in the skin over the area of the heart, symbolic of some psychic or emotional violence that has not yet fully healed, with the body itself seeming ulcerated and isolated from any trace of a lower body, and which underscores the sense of this persona as functionally

immobile. The face of the persona in this image is frozen in a deep stare, as if comprehending a deep truth inexpressible in mere words or mundane action. The figure in *To Murphy II* is rendered in much deeper tones of red and pink, and the pictorial area behind and around it both matches and overwhelms the figure with a likewise redolence of the bodily color that Pelli has chosen as a tonal trigger in her work. The body representing this version of Murphy differs in almost every formal characteristic from its predecessor. There is still the lack of a lower torso, still a personified comparison between the problems of the head and the heart, between unseen cerebral conflicts and the overt progression of bodily conflicts as a form of pictorial agenda. Both the face and the inner organs of this figure are more specifically rendered, with the face expressing a sort of dread, the expression otherwise muted and the gaze drawn out and beyond the veil of the image. This figure's body is depicted as a view of its interior organs, which seem to have radically expanded, as if they were handling too heavy a load of symbolic emotion, and were about to burst. The descriptive appearance of the organs, their distinct utility yet ambiguous symbolism, are perversely analogous to the condition of the affliction the person is unable to communicate, yet by a means of psychic emotional projection, makes us perceive what afflicts them.

In a recent set of images, *Surface Perception I & II* (both 2003), we are presented with a pair of figures drawn in red paint on a white background, viewed from a distance of middle perspective. The figures in *Surface Perception I* are without arms and their faces stare off to the side, dramatically unaware of the angle by which we may perceive them. Caught in the middle of a pensive moment or act, their faces are also obscured by a haze of pink and red paint which draws our eyes toward them. The main action in *Surface Perception I* involves the sequence of two figures with, alternately, a sequence of multiple hearts and one of scars emanating from their forms. The difference between these two types of imagery acts as both a foil for the narrative quality of the image overall and as a metaphor for the differences between the characters these personae represent; each will be transformed by the event, yet the outcome is left unresolved. In *Surface Perception II* we view them first as integrated entities, each with a set of merged visible interior organs. Then later, the figures which seemed to have acquired a unified quality as if they had progressed in evolutionary terms, may have been yet again transformed – the result being the single figure to the far left with somewhat mangled, partial, inner organs.

The universe which Pelli depicts is characterized by her use of color to impose mood, to overpower the senses and therefore extend the degree of inquiry into a more hermetic and intellectual realm, though one still tinged by the emotions projected by her personae. This is a dramatic strategy which centers upon how the painterly and depictive qualities of a given scene may impose formal and conceptual values upon the narrative event at hand. Pelli's color of choice is pink, which she refers to as "my black," a color

she often uses and which was once the predominant color of her palette. Pelli has chosen to use this color as the overall qualifier not only of narrative depiction but as the backdrop in which her personae enact their innately interior dramas. As a color, pink has many connotations which extend past the aesthetic control of the artist at hand. It is redolent of human skin, and therefore equally erotic and visceral. It is also a color associated with girlish femininity, and for an adult it represents something of a taboo. More formally it presents certain painterly difficulties, as it overwhelms the visual locus of a given scene when used to excess. However, in recent years Pelli has added a variety of other colors to the mix, and has also alternated the use of pink as field, line, and overshadowing. As the color utilized in representation, it takes on a quality that is not as pictorially aggressive, yet still continues to reinforce her use of line. It is not so much that pink has been replaced in her new work as reinterpreted. In the past it dominated the work, and though it is still strongly evident, the constancy of its application has been curtailed in favor of sketching out dramatic scenarios which rely upon a different narrative element.

Lingering Dissolution (2002) presents a central figure in a state of active emotion, with attached exterior hearts emanating from its form, and two faces in profile, slightly behind it. Instead of an ordinary, interior, single heart, the figure seems to manifest this out of control, over sensitive state, as if its body were solid, but the organ in question were undergoing some sort of transference or phase between one dimension and another. The event taking place seems to be the product of an emotional state in which the two characters or faces attached and behind the central figure, are viewable here only because of the emotional effect their memory imposes upon the character. The hearts that are phasing in and out of the body are a symbolic measure of how this character is unsure to whom its heart belongs—itsself, (and therefore hidden and functional to him/her), or to the object of its consideration, and therefore outside of him/her, projected into the ether of an insubstantial, unrequited love. What dramatizes this image in a manner radically differentiated from past works is its use of color. The scene overall is a deep cerulean blue, as if the character inhabited a subterranean or undersea world. This environment is painted more heavily above the figure, and is separated on the "ground" by a long red line suggesting a wall or corner being formed behind the figure, placing him not only in emotional but also physical isolation. The body of the center figure itself is on the whole, vague, suggested only by a white silhouette, with slightly more heavily painted sections where feet and middle torso would be located. The pose it infers is one of resignation, turned toward the viewer – exposing not only its internal condition, but inner thoughts as well. The amount of details that are provided here are of course merely suggestive, and overall they are obscured by the opaque, incandescent presence of a pink nimbus which surrounds the faces, and which finds its tonal match in the blurred motion suggested by the moving hearts.



Stilted, 1999 - oil on canvas, 75" x 49"

The image in *Handicapped* (2000) is contextually central to Pelli's development of a symbolic representation of innate desire which often takes the form of a physically recognized scene. The interior situation dramatically depicted enacts its own sort of narrative through a wide range of views or visions. In this work, Pelli renders the parable of the overt against the inert and innate, with a figure whose functional immobility is merely a stasis enforced by its physical limitations reflected as fatal circumstance. The personae inhabiting this figure are one and the same, but are also two characters, one residing inside the other. The painting is a study in the quality of psychological projection as dominated visually by the fleshly color Pelli often uses to characterize the agendas of her work. Overwhelmingly pink, this canvas contains only a single figure, which is delineated in the most minimal fashion possible, with one slightly darker outline of color for the shape of its upper torso and shoulders. The lines which describe the chair (in which the central figure sits in) is rendered only by the merest outlines of straight vertical and horizontal lines, defining it as a cage of sorts, with a footrest below and a large wheel beneath it. Though by her depiction, the chair seems to sit upon the wheel rather than be just connected to it for the purpose of utility. The personae inhabiting this emotionally distant and oppressive field of visual endeavor are two in number, one set inside the interior of the other figure, like the image of hearts or intestines is similarly made



Angle of Immunity, 2000 - oil, manipulated transfers on canvas, 60" x 48"

visible in other of Pelli's works—for the purpose of revealing states of emotion that would otherwise be mislaid pictorially. The face of the central figure is caught in the middle of an intense reaction to some external and removed event which can not be perceived, the outcome of which is the mark or presence of another visage in its interior. These two faces can be perceived as either a dual habitation or they can be seen as a species of chronologically defined versions of the selfsame entity, projected or remembered from a previous time.

In a much earlier work, *Stilted* (1999), we view an ephemeral scene in which two personae, a male and a female one, share the same prosthetic body, an elongated slab of meat which stands on two dark poles and is also suspended from above by tenuous strings. In the distance, off to the right, erased traces of another set of similar figures, are suspended by strings though not by stilts. Pelli describes this image as embodying themes of physical vacancy and attachment over time. The two personae inhabit a figure which, despite their presence, is incapable of separate movement, and which inhabits a locality which is predominantly characterized by a lack of physical detail and the visceral and tabooed color with which she decidedly characterizes the homogenous environment in which her emotional parables come aptly to life.

Another formal characteristic that innately defines her work is the utilization of dramatic perspective. In dealing with the figure, and especially a type of figurative depiction

which on its face suspends most of the natural laws of proportion, scale, and dimension, it is important that certain formal aspects which relate to sensory perception still hold sway, perspective being foremost among these. What Pelli achieves through the use of perspective is perhaps unique, for it functions not only to place her personae in the visual field of the viewer, but girds them within their immediate surroundings, and creates a greater context for us to explore their idiosyncratic situations as characters and totemic figures. Since there are few visual clues in her works to tie her personae into the physical world from which we draw our own sense of bodily knowledge, it is important to consider how the perspectival remove of the viewer affects our comprehension of her personae and their depictive agenda.

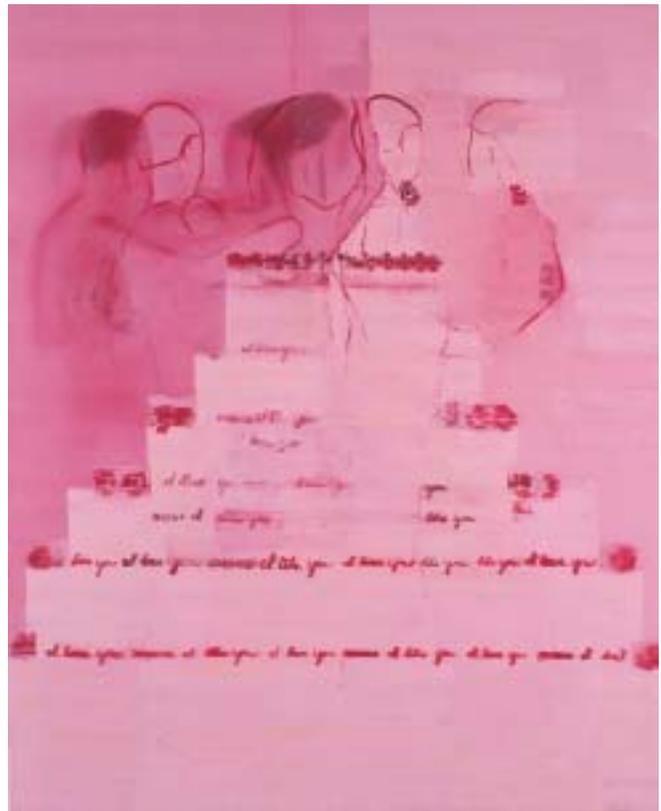
In *Angle of Immunity* (2000), a figure sits upon a wide chair which is slightly upturned yet rests within an intangible area. A round unframed mirror rests on the figure's lap, and it is within the reflected area of the mirror that another face (not that of the sitter's) is reflected and seen. The title of this work refers to a Beckketian idea about how one may safely regard an object of vision (i.e., desire) without being seen or visually caught. The mirror is a symbol for the realization of truth. If it reflects reality, then it gives us only a refracted image, reversed and pale by comparison to the image which our own eyes would present to us. A truth glimpsed offers up reality as artifice, framed and valued by the physical area of the mirror which, just like a painting, can only present the perspective which its formal qualities allows us to view. Our position facing the image reveals little more than is dramatically intended; we may see in the person's face a measure of the anxiety and expectation they have of the event they expect to view, however acutely, via the mirror, and our specific angle of regard is likewise limited to the mirror this person represents as one of us.

Castle-Land (2003) presents a scene in which two characters are in the middle of some sort of confrontation or conversation, one of whom has a full body with exposed hearts and intestines, and the other who is identified by its face alone. Several new pictorial elements enliven this painting, such as the fact that the main figure is involved in more than one divestment of emotional control; that dangling above the two characters is a human heart suspended from a rope; and that in the distance, a series of castle towers and spires loom, though they are drawn in blurry, indecisive strokes, and may in fact not be a natural backdrop but an imaginary one instead. Pelli qualifies the form of the hanging heart as one which may be pulled away and removed from sight (or utility) at any time, yet the mere presence of an external heart ready for use bespeaks its availability, and not its threat of imminent removal. This work clearly adds to the expression of iconic language which has previously resided in her paintings and drawings. The occlusion of narrative concerns in no way lessens the iconic, and therefore totemic, status of her new work, only serving to qualify them as a form of communication as well as a system of spiritual symbols. Whether we view Pelli's characters as persons or

totems in a particular order is of less consequence than that we see them as complex entities, both personifying and feeling while at the same time symbolizing and projecting. Pelli's works are developed with particular regard to emotional themes as well as to ideas of representation, so they tend to take on a dual identity: first as characters with atypical and idiosyncratic emotional depth, a degree of opacity, and a sensitivity to how they are either connected to, intimate with, or disaffected from their environments or each other. Secondly, they also fulfill important roles as totemic figures, a series or system of iconic entities reflecting upon the human condition which Pelli means to continuously expose. In both conceptions, it remains important to consider that no matter how they are ambiguously conceived or interpreted through the subtext of emotions or ideas, that their singularity as a progressive rendering of human experience in its totality—and therefore of a movement from ignorance to enlightenment—is at the heart of their cumulative depiction and a model for our own evolution as human beings.

In *"Mirror Mirror on the Wall"* (2002), there is a person who sits regarding her reflection in a large ornately carved mirror. The person has a forlorn, sad look upon her face, and dark looming shapes evident inside her chest, of a sickened or broken heart. The image of her reflection stares back at her as a strong and impassive figure with no visible organs. Instead, it reveals two faces, one stacked atop the other, in a totemic fashion, as if to say that this is how the person on this side of the mirror would prefer to be seen. This could be a memory of her past self or a self-fulfilling prophecy. The character in this case does little, although the scene pictured here provides more dramatic detail than Pelli often utilizes. Because of it, we see the innate humanity of the character, and her vulnerability. At the same time, Pelli exposes her innate affliction, whether real or symbolically projected in a visual extreme. We are made to feel that a veil of reality is being minutely lifted, and that two worlds simultaneously perceive the other. One persona carries their affliction in humours (the idea that organs carrying different liquids through the body could characterize and determine the excessive quality of one's affliction), or in the mind, as modern Psychology assumes that we are psychically split and naturally ambivalent in a view of our innate self.

The formal and conceptual accomplishments of Leemour Pelli comprise a body of work which is both aesthetically and tautologically impressive. The depiction of vague landscapes and simple yet loaded details represent a retelling of the psychic event of inspiration. Hidden beneath the evidence at hand is the language of idiosyncratic identity, which possesses a mythos of its own. Its measure of reality is bound up in emotional agendas which are realized through the pastiche of formalist aims. This allows us to make our own aesthetic leaps while we are simultaneously acted upon by its latent emotional charge. A measure of the human condition is everywhere in Pelli's work, stretching from dream into parable and back again.



Cake-words, cake-people, 2001 - oil on canvas, 60" x 48"



Castle Land, 2003 - oil on canvas, 70" x 54"



All a Memory Now, 2000 - latex, collage on paper, 30" x 22"

All a Memory Now

One of Leemour Pelli's most compelling pieces in the exhibition is a work on paper, *All a Memory Now, 2000*. It is a somewhat protruding latex image on paper that shows the internal organs in a disembodied human torso, and is a representation of guts. Imbedded in this life-size, poetic "x-ray" is a faint image of a woman's face that could suggest an enigmatic, second "heart". This body remnant floats in an empty space as do other figures that are existing, sitting, and undergoing internal experiences, (or do nothing) in a vacuum of existence and paint. There are many ways this image can be read; as an autopsy, anatomy lesson, portrait or memory. As the artist states: "*All a Memory Now* is a poetic depiction of what one can not see in reality, namely, the feeling or thought of someone inside you, a mark or (emotional) memory of an experience of someone."

In this work, as in others, the viewer is presented with fragments and traces of the human figure that are revealed by outlines, blurred shapes, vague photo-portraits, stains and other residues of human activity. This piece could also act as a strange oval-shaped "body" mirror. Pelli refers to this as an "impossible object" because it contains what is not normally seen in a mirror or a body/figure. Interestingly, it seems to reflect the viewer through the semi-transparent organs.

The artist uses various media, including a Xerox transfer technique to repeatedly, and almost obsessively, put portraits, faces, and anatomical organs into her works on paper and paintings. This repetition of images haunts us with real, but anonymous, figures and shadows of past memories and experiences. Their isolation and anonymity is reinforced by being partially obscured with the layer of latex.

This image of lungs, heart, and other body organs, is macabre but not in a gruesome way. The monochrome sepia color and lack of detail separates this assemblage of organs from the real world and the vagueness allows the organs to take on a more symbolic meaning. It appears that the body and all the internal complexities are represented more simply, as if noted from memory.

Kevin Haran
Gallery Director



Rockaby, 1998 - oil, pencil, latex on canvas, 60" x 48" (Collection of Phil Rampy, Orlando, Florida)

Biography:

Leemour Pelli was born in New York, and currently lives and works in New York City. She is a graduate of the School of Visual Arts (B.F.A., painting, 1994), Hunter College (Master of Arts degree in Art History, 1989), and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (B.A. in English Literature). While pursuing these degrees, she also studied at the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem, the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, in Paris, and at Cornell University. Her first one-person exhibition was at Nikolai Fine Art in New York in 2000. The artist's recent exhibitions include the Whitney Museum of American Art at Champion, Connecticut, PS1 Institute of Contemporary Art in Long Island City, Artcore Gallery in Toronto, the Reddot Gallery in New York, and the Gallery of South Orange, New Jersey. Her work has been reviewed in Art News, The New York Times, New York Arts Magazine, and The Globe and Mail, among other publications.

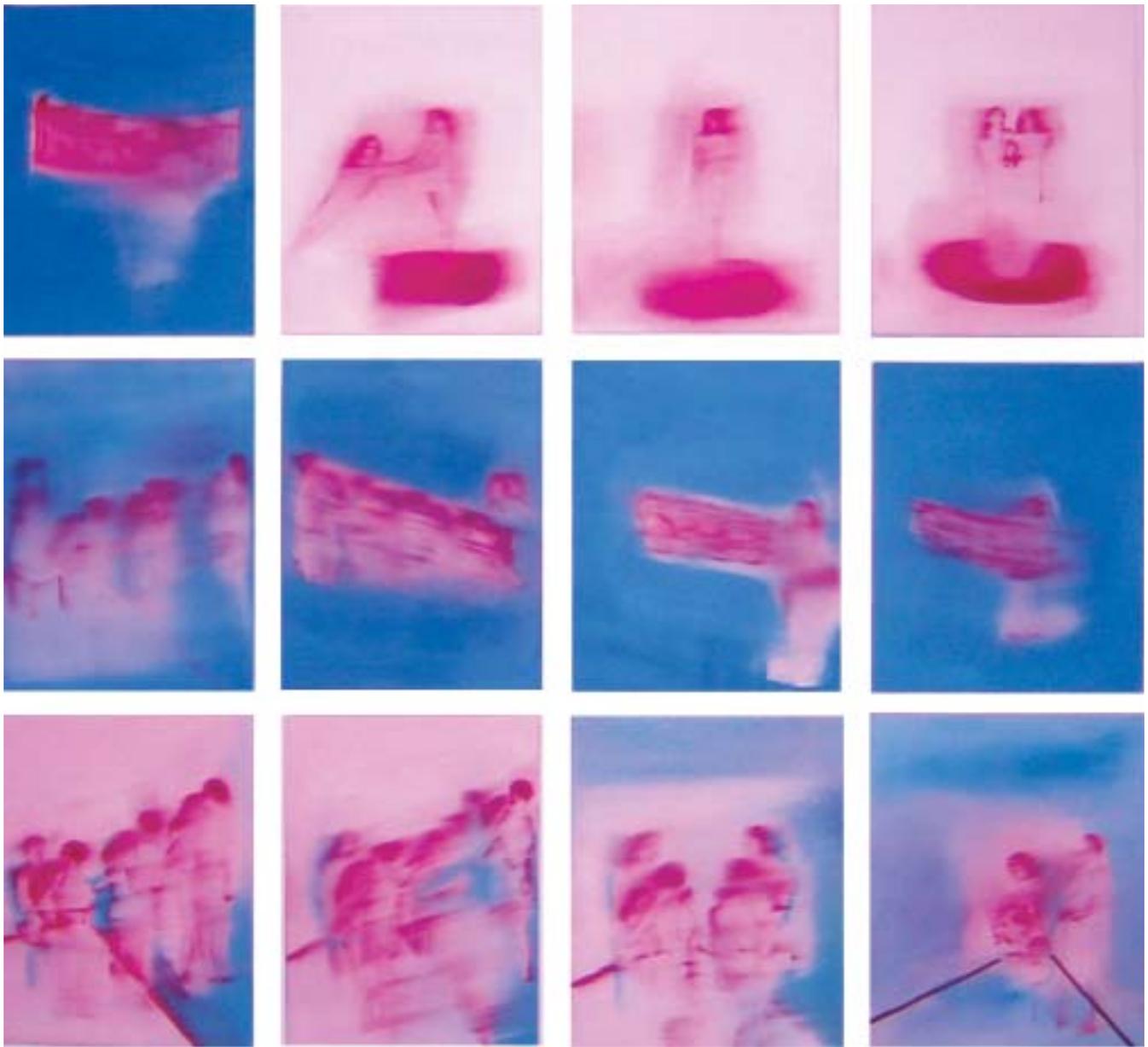
Artist Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Kevin Haran and the gallery committee of the Art Department at UCF for selecting me for this exhibition. I would also especially like to thank David Gibson for his unwavering support and encouragement over the years, and for writing about my work for this catalogue.

I would also like to thank Phil Rampy, Barry Miller, Kathryn O'Donnell, and Chris Carone for their generous support both of my work and the realization of this catalogue.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, and my brother, Daniel Pelli, for their ongoing encouragement and support.

Leemour Pelli



Installation, 2002-2003 - oil on canvas. Each canvas 14" x 11", Castles in the Head, Play-Time, Not in Perception, Heart Attachment, Kingdom, Untitled, In Perception I, In Perception II, A New Retrospective, Fatal Things, In my Den Again, In my Den.

University of Central Florida
Art Gallery
Orlando, Florida