



Luis Gordillo, *Corazón de Jesús en Vos confío*, 1992.
Acrylic on paper and board on canvas, 95 1/4 x 137".
Courtesy Marlborough, N.Y.

LUIS GORDILLO

BY ALISA TAGER

Luis Gordillo's recent paintings put a tourniquet on passion and a ligature on anxiety. He balances his paintings in the moment of synapse between restraint and release, confinement and ebullition. The element of conflict is fundamental. Working through paradoxes, he presents a dialogue between contradictory paradigms. By undermining hierarchies and establishing enticing rhythms of line, form, and color, Gordillo enunciates the allure of antinomy and incongruity.

Over three decades since his first exhibition, his works continue to evidence an exuberance and adventurousness which few artists are able to achieve, let alone maintain. Perusing his delightfully iconoclastic body of work evidences his continuous potential for experimentation as well as his ability to challenge, and

often anticipate, artistic movements and tendencies. He has worked his way through automatism, Pop, figuration, and myriad perambulations of abstraction. At the end of 1992, Gordillo made his belated and awaited North American debut. Instead of presenting a retrospective to provide historical contextualization for a new audience, Gordillo presented a new body of work which not only expands his own painterly vocabulary, but solidly locates him alongside several contemporaries from the United States.

Whereas he has always worked with the ambiguous space between absence and substance, his most recent paintings and drawings further explode the pictorial space. Lines are often blurrier or more obscured and areas which were previously defined are often inferred instead

of specified. In *Tropical Descolgado*, (1991), he forms a loose arrangement of differently seized canvases wherein smaller parts are placed upon larger elements and separate canvases are suspended apart from the principal composition. He used the same flat, restrained color schemes of his previous series as well as similar intestinal contours and loopy lines. While he has maintained his formal vocabulary, his loose system is beginning to implode. Outlined amoebas melt off to the side as their internal delineations disappear. An informally laid outline of a decorative motif lurks below the surface turmoil which is partially covered by smaller canvases which simultaneously explicate and confuse the larger scenario.

The entire painting is a biological system gone awry. It is not, however, run amuck which is emphasized by the two identical canvases off to the side. Much like Robert Rauschenberg's wry paintings of 1957, *Factum I* and *Factum II*, Gordillo juxtaposes individuality with replication and spontaneity with precise control. The cell-like blobs and scribbled circles float from one plane into the next and stop in one canvas to be continued in a mutated form. The distinct canvases seem to reveal interiors and magnifications as they simultaneously shirk precise location.

While Gordillo's paintings have always balanced logic with intuition and lively gestures with painstaking calculations,

his recent works are increasingly awkward and vulnerable. *Cuarto Menguante* and *Hamlet o no Hamlet* are both multi-panel paintings which seem so frenetic and tentative that they risk complete fragmentation. It is, in part, this risk which makes them so unpredictable, ambivalent, and, therefore, enticing. Built upon skewed grids and electrical impulses, these expansive pictures resonate by virtue of their seeming instability. He twists the tenets of abstraction by invoking and then upending elements of formal abstraction, geometric abstraction, abstraction of representation and any other established precedents.

Gordillo's arrival in the United States places him squarely within the current rhetoric surrounding abstraction and painting in general. In many ways, his recent works have more in common with American painting than with Spanish painting. This is not to infer that his paintings are derivative or even influenced by American painters; indeed, Gordillo's paintings have often seemed oddly prophetic when alongside his contemporaries and the discrepancies are often as elucidating as the similarities. Next to artists such as Lydia Dona, Carol Dunham, Jonathan Lasker, and Lari Pittman, Gordillo's new paintings become significant not only in relation to his own body of work, but in relation to the dynamic alignments among their works.

It is with Lydia Dona that he shares a

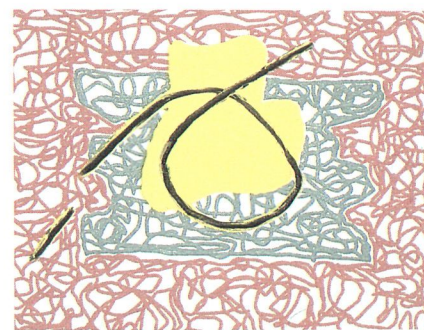
common bond in respect to his intent of undermining hierarchies of abstraction. Fragmenting and skewing from within the space of the painting, they both set about reconstructing bizarre systems in strange agglomerations bound towards entropy. Juxtapositions of empty space, cellular forms, computer diagrams, and undisciplined grids form impenetrable codes of biological and technological lineage. They both use mundane colors laid flatly upon the canvas which unhinge assumed conjectures of painterly space. Working through the linguistics of abstraction in overwhelming cacophonies of disjointed machinations, they formulate strange hybrids of abstract arrangements.

In Dona's conglomerations, everything invades and interferes with everything else. Unnatural drips, which seem to be meltdowns more than flourishes or gestural evidence, unite her contorted circuitries. Gordillo, however, has a more chunky, strangely humorous manner of intermingling incongruous constructions. By superimposing canvases and utilizing gangly squiggles and lines, he makes more oblique connections in playful, yet irascibly difficult, meanderings. They construct strange labyrinths of meaning through lines and forms which coil around, pull out, push forward, and contort. They have a strangely physical resonance with a disconcerting push-me, pull-me lack of equilibrium.

Jonathan Lasker's quirky paintings

share the sense of imbalance, disjunction, and composed awkwardness, but his cynical wit redetermines the direction of distortion. Like Gordillo, he has a funky sense of humor which emphasizes the open-ended possibilities inherent in paradox and incongruity. Discordant rhythms modulate the vibrant lines and compositions. Both painters have an edginess based on the schism between the appearance of joyful manoeuvring, unrestrained gesturalism and the reality of strict logic and imposed restraint. Their work is knowingly duplicitous.

Lasker's tangles and arrangements appear casual, yet they are painstakingly calculated. Doodles become significant gestures for both Lasker and Gordillo as they translate them from visual registrations of subconscious ramblings into precise renderings. Gordillo has often used the random marking and squiggles



Jonathan Lasker, *Spit*, 1992. Oil on canvas board, 11 x 14". Courtesy Sperone Westwater.

he makes while he talks on the phone -- a contemporary form of automatic drawing, initially incorporated by the Surrealists. Lasker makes small drawings of the exact doodles which he

Lari Pittman, *Ennobled and Neeedy*, 1992, acrylic and enamel on mahogany panel, 82 x 66"



duplicates onto the canvas for his paintings. The seemingly free and frenetic lines are simulated gestures. Logic and intuition, spontaneity and precision collide in iconoclastic agglomerations.

While Caroll Dunham lacks this sense of conflict and opposition, his abstractions are absurd ventures into distortion via similar contorsions. Like Gordillo, his colorful orbs and vigorous lines move in a playful to and fro between abstraction and figuration. Like clouds or dreams, figures appear and vanish. They are amorphous and sometimes biological blobs which become monsters or phantoms. Gordillo's enduring fascination with psychoanalysis, dreams, and the subconscious often plays itself out in similar manifestations of ambivalent imagery. Without imposing narrative structures, they allude to its possibilities. They complicate the habitual confines of abstract purity and narrative constructs.

Although Lari Pittman's paintings are more figurative than abstract, they also

fall into this realm of narrative ambiguity. Recognition of form and figure do not predetermine the possibility of locating the descriptive essence or intent. Bizarre iconographies induce the sentiment of abstraction in a deranged dream.

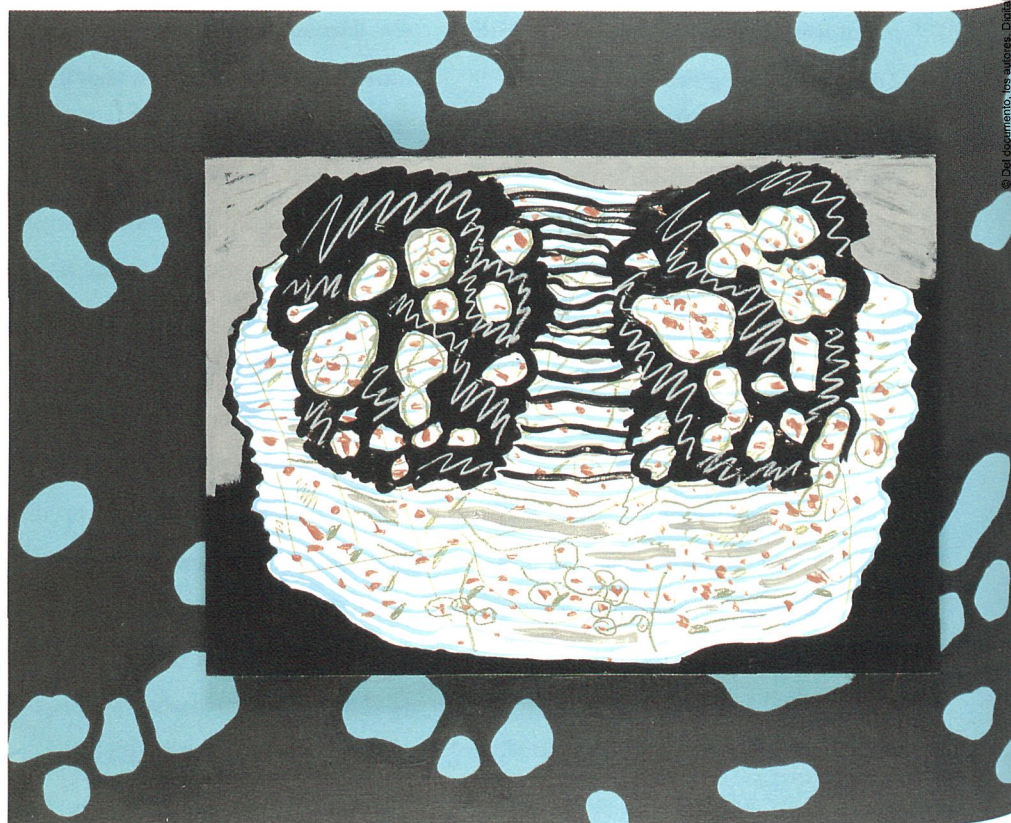
Highly stylized and flatly painted images float back and forth to the forefront or recesses of labyrinthine stories.

Simultaneously engaging the sinister and the humorous, Pittman reconjures surrealism's impishly delightful appeal.

Abstraction, figuration, and design merge in seriously whimsical worlds of desire and perpetual metamorphoses. Disassociated elements snarl at the space and, like Gordillo, confound the desire

for precision and the seduction of resolution. Working through pictorial devices, both Pittman and Gordillo work through absurdity and contrariety to redetermine logical patterns and cryptic codes.

These artists are all naughty iconoclasts who confront and confound established symbols -the drip, the line, the grid, antiquated imagery of bygone tales all become fodder for their idiosyncratic vision. They avoid the painterly temptations of depth and the formal reconciliation of disparate elements. They are concerned with the ordering of space and with the gap between paradigms in an elusive state between opposite impulses. Instead of seeking absolutes, he revels in ambiguity and its capacity for perpetual revolution.



Luis Gordillo, *Islotización*, 1990. Acrylic on canvas, 28 3/4 x 39 3/8". Courtesy Marlborough G.