

GRIMANESA  
AMOROS

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## The World

essay by Dan Cameron

April 21 – May 31, 1994

CAROLYN J. ROY GALLERY

46 Greene Street, New York City 10013 212-941-0626

# HIDDEN TREASURES

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As part of the seemingly endless quest to come to terms with its own origins, the art of the past couple of decades has managed to re-define the process of its making in such a way as to force us to question the very basis of our understanding of aesthetic form. Prior to this, the drive towards a determinate, 'final' state of artistic form was generally perceived as continual, even evolutionary, in its tendency towards a fixed state of materials, shapes and surfaces. All that has changed, however, as the question of form has become gradually more relegated to issues of context, and relativised to the point where it is far from certain whether defining an ideal form is or should be art's long-term goal -- or even, in fact, whether such a possibility can still be said to exist.

Grimanesa Amoros' art plays deftly with the notion that painting and sculpture might come into being through the process of shedding, as opposed to accumulating, the more physical aspects of form, so that the condition in which her subjects are presented does not function as a 'final' state at all, but more like one of several possible chosen moments within which the process of coming-into-being has been captured. To pursue that notion a bit more, we might even say that Amoros' work tends to reject the inclination towards making the tactile presence of form the single most defining characteristic in the artist's representation of living things. Instead, she seems to opt for states of being that are at once cruder and more metaphysical, steeped in serious myth but also lighthearted to the point of verging on childlike. Their limbs crowding

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the canvas borders in exuberant swaths of bright, simple colors, Amoros' figures often seem more like jagged patches of energy or amorphous clusters of protoplasm than solid flesh and bone. This strategy of representation serves her purpose by introducing the illusion of an unguarded, *naif* sensibility at work, which keeps our skepticism at bay just long enough for it to become clear that Amoros is addressing much deeper questions than painting is usually expected to bear, and doing so in a way that makes us question in turn our own tendency to reject the pictorial role of universal symbolism in an increasingly deconstructed and self-signifying environment.

To a large degree, Amoros' ability to enter into certain areas of representation with an unguarded aplomb stems from her deep immersion in a cultural background that has never required artists to conceal their belief in the life-transforming potential of art. Born and raised in Lima, Peru, Amoros' interest in the art, religion and languages of indigenous peoples has extended far beyond the already extraordinary accomplishments of pre-Colombian culture in the Andes region. The idea of mapping out certain of her personal cosmological principles through a wall-length installation consisting of a few dozen multi-colored petals -- each a unique monochrome paper work cast from an identical mold -- being carried away from a round red stamen, provides us with both a not-so-hidden reference to the Romantic belief in the ephemerality of human existence, as well as more subtle undertones suggesting non-Western systems of representing time. Setting aside for a moment Amoros' reliance on universalist

thought -- most reflected in her choice of colors as a means of representing the various races of the world -- this work (titled, appropriately enough, 'The World') also demonstrates her almost pragmatic belief that locating meaning in art is never a question of the artist's or viewer's level of visual sophistication, but rather of their capacity to accept what is given as significant. In that regard, while the initial appearance of 'The World' seems at first to defy us to see it as anything other than a cheery abstraction, the hidden strength that it shares with much of Amoros' work stems from its capacity to provoke us into examining where the obstacles against detecting meaning are rooted, and appreciating the degree to which they are able to prevent us grasping the subtle ambiguities that are present in even the simplest of life's pleasures.

Just as the animalistic contortions of Amoros' painted figures force us to gradually come to terms in some way with the precarious balance inherent to our own systems of belief, so the disarming directness of her style also seem to grapple with the question of identity, in terms of the degree to which. In her investigation into what art, above all, can mean above and beyond questions of style and form, Amoros nevertheless allows herself (and us) to be drawn into, and eventually bridge, the inevitable gap that springs up when one has made the decision to try to experience something and depict it at the same time.





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