

Dr. T. F. Chen

Princess Diana Series I: A
Tribute in Art to The Queen of
People's Hearts

The New World Art Center through
April 26

BY ALEXANDRA ANDERSON-SPIVY

CURRENTLY FESTOONING the New World Art Center is an exhibition of remarkable paintings by Dr. T. F. Chen, a self-proclaimed Neo-Iconographer. In his newest series, *Princess Diana, Series I: A Tribute to The Queen of People's Hearts*, the exuberant middle-aged Taiwanese artist has repositioned Princess Diana, Prince Charles, and the young princes William and Harry, as well as the whole British royal family (sometimes) within the appropriated precincts of some of the world's best-loved masterpieces. Dodi Fayed also makes a rather ghostly appearance in some of the pictures which appear to quote from Seurat. Dr. Chen, who studied art in Paris in the 1960s, enjoys creating historical global and historical pastiches composed of profuse, often fabulously arbitrary quotes from other works of art. A convert to the Moral Rearmament Movement, he inaugurated what he calls "Art" in 1969. (To find out more about it, you'll have to read the brochure.)

A tour around the large gallery, which is only one of the floors of Dr. Chen's six-story New World Art Center, will bring visitors face-to-face with dozens of images of the late, lamented Candle in the Wind inserted into passages quoted from everyone from Vermeer, Raphael, and Renoir and to Cézanne, Munch, and Mondrian. It is a cut-and-paste phenomenon that demonstrates new and dazzling dimensions of cultural slippage.

In *HOW OLD ARE YOU?* for example,

Diana, Charles, Queen Elizabeth, and baby William have been excised from a court photograph and set down amongst the princess, the attendant, the dog, and the dwarf from Velasquez' *LOS MENINAS*. There are also a whole bunch of men in suits standing behind the happy Royal Family, but it is hard to tell who they actually are or what they might signify in this mad melange. (Under Dr. Chen's direction, Diana, like Woody Allen in *Zelig*, miraculously assumes the capacity to appear at random in the middle of the most unlikely artistic compositions.) This — and I quote from the press release — "synthesis of rich cultural ideas and images, a new form of communication uniting different cultures, East and West, past and present," is meant as an homage to Diana as global iconic goddess. Or at least that's what I think might be going on here.

These busy canvases represent a strange, dyslectic cultural amalgam and a serious case of celebrity heroine worship. They also hit a low-water mark as 1990's global kitsch. It all goes to show what everyone already knows — just quoting from the masters doesn't get you within miles of making masterpieces (Picasso excepted — he knew how to do it, as does Mike Bidlo). These Diana pictures (which can also be purchased in the form of limited edition prints and as postcards) occupy the same arena as the new Franklin Mint product, the *DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES PORCELAIN PORTRAIT DOLL*. This "heirloom created to keep her beauty and spirit alive" is dressed in "the only authentic replica of the dress the Franklin Mint purchased at Christie's auction where all proceeds were donated to Diana's favorite charities." I don't think Dr. Chen is paying the Royal Family any licensing fees for using Diana's likeness. But then, he also has quite cheerfully appropriated most of art history without regard to

moral copyright. This enterprise could well be an April Fool's hoax. But it isn't. Instead, it's a sign of the *People Magazine/Titanic, the movie*, sentimentality that these days represents the operative global culture. Maybe the joke is on us.

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Jeff Way

Abstract Paintings: 1970-71

Mitchell Albus Gallery through May 2

BY LYLE REXER

A SEVENTH-CENTURY Chinese calligrapher once wrote that a masterpiece springs from the rare concurrence of five agreeable conditions: calm spirit, warm friendship, pleasant weather, good paper and ink, and the spontaneous desire to create. Beauty's birthed from constraint and spontaneity. Go to Mitchell Albus to see this principle in living form. You will only have to look at three paintings.

Only in a world that does not remember what its eyes have seen could this exhibit be considered historical. I regret the fact that Albus has felt the need to label this show with dates of origin. In current ways of thinking, what has been done once must be forgotten. The historical (anything created in the past) is no longer the dead hand of repression; that would be too grand, too romantic. It is, instead, a vast hole in the road toward success, to be widely skirted with eyes covered