

a long period of creative change has passed largely unseen, and that it is time to take notice. Right on. That's a whole other story, and the new work deserves the telling. The problem is, the new work looks as if it is present to justify an act of musty reclamation. Historicizing the 1970's paintings may be necessary, and the Albus Gallery is on that mission. Yet on a deeper level it plays right into contemporary amnesia. Once we have it in our heads that these are 1970's paintings and ratchet open a little art historical space for them, once we remark that Way was among the Chosen of the Whitney Biennial in '73, we can go back to forgetting the paintings. It will be a little harder, now that we've had another look, but the terms on which confront these paintings ought to be uncompromising: Behold. See. Respond. Grow. Then worry about where they fit in. In heaven, there will be no last names and no birth certificates.

In truth, fresh experience is what the Albus Gallery intends, but a small gallery has to play a niche game to get collectors and the media to pay attention. I only harp on this because the hardest thing we can do in an image-choked, overmediated world is to recover our responsiveness, to cut through received opinion and our own cherished attitudes, to accept the gifts that are all around us, and not let them slide away. It happened to me at the Davis Museum in front of the late Olitski and it happened in front of Jeff Way's paintings.

## Pier Consagra

Holly Solomon Gallery through April 25  
BY LYLE REXER

**P**ier Consagra has created his own Villa Valmarana at Holly Solomon, a place where matter and madness mix and the sublime dreams the ridiculous. The seventeenth-century Villa Valmarana stands outside Vicenza, noble city of Palladio, and comments on the capacities of the Baroque in a strange and novel way. Inside, it is decorated with celebrated frescoes by Giambattista Tiepolo and his son Giandomenico. Outside, from the walls, its architectural symmetries are ruefully observed by a series of dwarf sculptures. Some simply mimic classical figures. Others really are dwarf-like. These were made for a little girl who lived at the villa, a dwarf herself, so that she might see her own distortion as natural in an artistic world that aimed toward an increasingly abstract perfection. Perhaps they cheered her up by showing her the other face of the Baroque, the face of the grotesque. In a darker mood, she enjoyed the thought that just beyond rules of proportion and the elaboration of line lie realms of visual excess and even derangement. Perhaps inside every classicist there is a Catholic struggling to get out and gild everything.

The first thing you see when you walk into Holly Solomon is a dwarf. This glazed ceramic sculpture, titled *THE APPLE BOY, 1997*, serves as comment on all the work that follows — three acrylics on canvas, half a dozen drawings and eight sculptures, some quite large. In title, motif, materials and even organization, these works explore a Baroque underworld. In the canvases, for example, a floating, vertiginous space has been opened up

for things to tumble through. I say "things" because the objects in the frame are hard to describe. Some are parts of images, say of horses rearing, reined in by cartoonish, potatoey harlequins. Some are horn-snouted balloon faces. Others are just elaborate geometric forms — on further viewing very complicated exercises in perspective. In the midst of much goofiness occur acts of considerable virtuosity. Just two weeks ago, I visited the real Villa Valmarana, and I had a good look at the way Tiepolo uses a rounded stroke to lend mass and weight to figures. I recognized something similar here. Ditto Consagra's astonishing horses, which could have been lifted from Tiepolo's *APOLLO* fresco on the ceiling of the Kaisersaal in Wurzburg. At the same time, the pictures retreat from this burden, constantly undercutting their own virtuosity with hipness and checking their drive toward narrative.

The ceramic sculptures are even harder to describe. Some are monochromatically glazed, some festively pastelled. In a complicated and demanding process, they have been shaped and fired in pieces, then assembled. They seem a narrative tease, almost parodistic, with their quasi-mythological titles (*PHAETON*) and the classical allusions of their physical gestures. One figure, apparently kin to the first dwarf, attempts to lift a leg caught in goo. Others elude description because the forms are fixed in the midst of metamorphosis, giving birth to other forms. Organic and inorganic shapes arise out of one another and fall back into each other. The inspiration might be Ovid, whose epic of Pythagorean mutability became increasingly influential in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Consagra says the images originate in his unconscious, but they don't feel unconscious to me. At least not