



René Pierre Allain, *Ribbon Bar No. 11*, 1993, plaster compound, burlap, steel, 39% by 61 by 3 inches. Roger Ramsay.

stripes separate two pinkish terra-cotta fields. *Ribbon No. 28* features a dark blue-gray stripe near each edge of a yellow field. Color here is deep and subtle, but it is not displayed for lyrical atmospheric effect.

Allain's paintings are actually smooth slabs of tinted plaster that bring to mind frescoed wall fragments. Their soft, somewhat blotchy surfaces are lightly scratched from sanding, and viewed up close, they sparkle ever so slightly with tiny bits of mica. Enhancing their sense of architectural artifact, they are encased in massive, windowlike frames darkened with gun-blueing oil.

Allain began his career as a sculptor, and in recent years he has created a number of works incorporating found steel panels that have nudged his work back in that direction. The nearly eight-foot-long *13th Group Steel Bar* gives an almost cosmic impression of the night sky. Its dark surface displays a surprising variety of painterly effects, from a mirrorlike smoothness to cloudy scumbles. This work is an impressive piece that maintains a somber elegance.

—Garrett Holg

SAN FRANCISCO

Hung Liu

RENA BRANSTEN

Trained in Socialist Realism in her native China, Hung Liu arrived in the Bay Area in 1988 and almost immediately began a series of paintings that questions the status quo, especially as it affects female identity.

Working from turn-of-the-century clients' albums of young Chinese prostitutes, Liu

Hung Liu, *Yellow Pair*, 1993, oil on canvas, antique architectural wall panel, 72 by 96 inches. Rena Bransten.



mounted bric-a-brac on those appropriated images, intensifying the theatricality of the photographs. The paintings are more than showcases for women as commodities—they are symbols of female exploitation, not necessarily in the past. They strike an engaging balance between formal and social concerns, which is Liu's particular strength as an artist.

In her striking new work, Liu mostly isolates her figures in large, shaped canvases. These huge objects she

calls "identity fragments." *Yellow Pair*, a spin on Manet's *Olympia*, continues the prostitute theme, while two paintings illuminate the artist's formal concerns. *Couplet*, a pair of teapots coated in muddy browns, conspicuously lacks the sparkle of Liu's best works. By contrast *Three Graces*, a trio of stemmed vessels, is elegant in the poise of its composition and its subtle use of color.

Liu's work also has an element of parody, as in *Tai Chi*, whose cartoon figures spoof official Chinese art of 20 years ago. *Guerilla Girl* carries a touch of not particularly Chinese eroticism as Liu looks at a bunch of bananas, and the work can also be read as a comment on the glittering promise of American materialism. But the artist is not so much caught between two worlds as she is determined to make the best of her training and her newly experienced freedom.

In the self-portraits here, the two Hung Lius—subject and object—confront each other. Using the cultural collisions of her own journey to rewrite female identity, Liu portrays herself in *Avant-Garde* as a guerilla girl. And in *Daughters of the Revolution*, Liu confirms her independence even while showing herself caught between her past in China and her present life in the United States. Her paintings tellingly elaborate on the displacements of a life.

—Dorothy Burkhart

LOS ANGELES

United: All the Continent

GALERIA LAS AMERICAS

In a mélange of 150 artworks from the Americas—South, Central, and North—gallery owner Linda Vallejo promoted her own work along with that of 49 other Latinos, crammed art into every inch of space, and sold work off the walls, replacing it with others available for purchase. But no one faults Vallejo's professionalism because she promotes respect for Latin American art and provides a lively forum for artists who have few other outlets in Los Angeles.

By showing what she calls a "full spectrum" of Latin American art, Vallejo hopes to shock



Linda Vallejo, *Evil and Innocence*, 1993, gouache on canvas, 30 by 22 inches. Galería Las Américas.

visitors into understanding that a rich resource of material is being overlooked. For every big name on view, dozens of unheralded artists displayed a wide range of talent.

Painting in gouache, Vallejo explores the feminine unconscious and issues of religion and morality. In her work *Evil and Innocence*, two ghoulish characters ogle a self-conscious female nude whose head is a pink butterfly. Isabel Martinez presents an anguished view of women, who are painted in an expressionistic style. In *The Price of Beauty*, a mixed-media cutout depicts a bathrobe-clad woman with her hair in rollers and her face slathered with a beauty potion.

Using a lighter touch, in a watercolor-on-plastered-paper technique that resembles fresco, Teddy Sandoval paints dreamlike images of winged hearts, crosses, and figures submerged in water. Another sen-