

ARTFORUM

JANUARY 2010

Sharon Horvath

LORI BOOKSTEIN FINE ART

I'm always happy for an excuse to go back to my Wallace Stevens. So when I noticed that Sharon Horvath titled her recent show "Parts of a World" after the poet's wartime collection, the book immediately opened. And why not? Horvath is, in fact, a literary painter, though not in the sense of being an illustrator. While there is often a hint of the glorious preciousness of medieval manuscript illumination or the dreamlike intensity of Maurice Sendak in her style, there is no text that guides the making of the paintings. And yet there is a kind of ensuing text, one that coalesces in the mind of the viewer who notices that he or she is not only a viewer but also a sort of reader, since Horvath paints both images and signs, and the difference between them can become very elusive. So I shouldn't have been surprised that my walk through Stevens's book furnished no direct clues to Horvath's new paintings, unless it be the sobering observation that "the dump is full / Of images," which puts me in mind of the darkly glimmering surfaces of some of the paintings, surfaces worked up by some process known best to herself—dispersed pigment, ink, and polymer on canvas (or on paper mounted on canvas)—as if some smudges and soot had been wiped clean on a scavenger's sleeve to reveal the gleaming jewels underneath.

Perhaps this sense that the paintings are made of things abandoned and then rescued comes in part from the fact that some of them have been worked on over quite a long time. *Afterlife* and *Nightbed* are both dated 2002–2009; both are densely woven with a multiplicity of viewpoints and endless levels of detail within detail. Passages seemingly depicted straight-on, like a landscape, flow seamlessly into ones that we seem to be looking down upon, like maps (including those maps one looks down at in order to look up—I mean star maps). Then one notices other elements that seem to have entered the picture sideways or upside down. The transitions, however sweeping, are handled so suavely that it is impossible to doubt that, however long it may have taken, the artist has arrived at a degree of control over her materials that the viewer may admire but not necessarily equal: The paintings can be pleasantly dizzying, but there's also frequently a sense that one's inner-ear labyrinth might be on the verge of being overwhelmed. Though not excessively large, these three works are among the largest paintings Horvath has exhibited in a career that now spans nearly twenty-five years, as is *Your Blue Loom, for Martin Ramirez*, 2007, whose spatial construction at least initially seems simpler and more diagrammatic, though it is really as much Piranesi as Ramirez. *About the Car*, 2006–2009, resolves its compositional complexities into the duality of a searing turquoise/red complementarity the likes of which has hardly been seen since the heyday of psychedelia and Warhol's *Factory*. Without eschewing the meditative intimacy that has long been a hallmark of Horvath's work, the paintings in this show have a racy immediacy that is new to it. Their subjects seem to be not so much those of Stevens as the ones that Walt Whitman once proclaimed to be the Soul's favorites: night, sleep, death, and the stars—only baseball, sex, and rearview mirrors seem to have worked their way in, too.

—Barry Schwabsky

Sharon Horvath,
Afterlife, 2002–2009,
dispersed pigment,
polymer, and collage
on canvas, 68 x 76".

