

Best in Show

Recommendations by R.C. Baker

**Dan Flavin: The 1964
Green Gallery Exhibition**
Zwirner & Wirth
32 East 69th Street
Through May 3

Light White, Light Heat

JFK is a year in his grave, Vietnam is escalating, Warhol's elegiac flowers are on view at Castelli, and the Velvet Underground is coalescing from the dark recesses of downtown deviance. December 1964 conjures a Gotham both on edge and brilliantly edgy, so it's really no surprise that this re-creation of Dan Flavin's breakthrough solo show from that far-off month is the freshest, most challenging and uplifting exhibition in town. First, take a long look at the sketches that Flavin executed for visualizing the placement of his fluorescent lights in the original Green Gallery space, especially a see-through floor plan in pencil. It's fascinating to see how the artist's vision adjusted once his luminous works were actually in place—four vertical lamps have been edited completely out of one piece. Then there's the work itself, pure light handled with a painter's aplomb. Depthless grays are manifested in the center of *A primary picture*, a rectangle constructed from red, yellow, and blue light tubes. In another piece, differing temperature tints of "daylight" and "cool white" bulbs radiate from five white diagonals; where these tones meet and fade across the white wall, they create an enthralling limbo. Get in tight on *Red and green alternatives* to see how the darker tubes reflect the lighter ones (the Flavin estate periodically commissions large batches of discontinued hues from G.E.). The colors drift across these plain industrial fixtures like spray paint, flickering where they collide and recalling the numinous joins in a Rothko canvas. Although most of these seminal works hang on the wall like paintings, one spreads across the floor—not simply sculpture, really, but something beyond retinal stimulation and volume. Call it manufactured spiritualism.

Doris Lee

Part faux-naïf, part knowing modernism, these charming, bold paintings (1930-50) reveal an artist with the design chops to illustrate spreads in *Life* magazine and a hand lithe enough to splash out a marvelous nocturnal abstraction of palm trees. The tiny oil painting *Summer Souvenirs* recollects, through simple shapes and scumbled colors, the happy lassitude of collecting bugs in a jar and July 4th festivities. *The View*, painted in Woodstock in 1946, captures a bucolic vista of vegetable garden, cottage, and verdant mountains, the contours of the landscape drawn with undulating lines fluently synched to roof shingles, fence posts, and other homey compositional elements—a scene so inviting that one could easily yearn to live there, even if in the yellow outhouse. *D. Wigmore*, 730 Fifth Avenue, 212-581-1657. Through April 5.

Artforum ad

In addition to quoting a reader's missive decrying *Artforum's* "stuffiness [and] boring articles," Tim Griffin acknowledges in his current Editor's

Letter that the magazine is so bloated with ads that he's become weary of "*Adforum*" quips and snide comparisons to *Vogue*. But he lauds the frisson that arises from running dense critical essays (on, say, art and commerce) cheek-by-jowl with fashion ads and reams of gallery announcements. Be that as it may, the slick graphics and hot typography are enticing, even if the advertised exhibitions too often fall flat. So here's hoping that artist Peter Coffin can live up to the legendary illustrator he hired for his own ad: Al Jaffee. Riffing on the classic *Mad* magazine fold-in (which the now-87-year-old Jaffee initiated in 1964 as a parody of *Playboy's* foldouts), the page features astronomers surveying the stars and is captioned with such verbiage as "We'll follow the way of the Griffin and release the balloons!"



Zwirner & Wirth

Best in glow: Flavin's 1964 Green Gallery re-creation at Zwirner & Wirth

But line up the tabs and what you get is a flattened, dazed skateboarder. *Opening March 22, Andrew Kreps*, 525 W 22nd, 212-741-8849.

Carroll Dunham

These '80s paintings on wood throttle space and shake it like a dead cat. *Brain Secretes Thoughts* is spanned by a dozen variegated horizon lines smudged by carefully orchestrated drips and roughened by passages of sanded pigment and pencil scrawls. As the title implies, Dunham is after more than just gorgeous abstraction—a purple phallus droops down from the top edge as if sniffing after two globular nodes obtruding from the right. Swarming chromatic donuts and bilious portals of high-keyed color create a primordial soup from which Dunham's scatological cartoon creatures heave themselves into the light. *Skarstedt*, 20 E 79th, 212-737-2060. Through April 5.

Rashid Johnson: 'The Dead Lecturer'

Johnson's personal ad—"Young artist seeks audience... Must enjoy race mongering, disparate disconnected thoughts and sunsets (really)... Ability to hold conversation using only rap lyrics... a must"—is the funniest thing I've read in a press release in ages. OK, so that bar isn't set particularly high, but still, Johnson flags conflicting emotions in his huge 2008 sniper-scope sculpture, *Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos*, fabricated from blackened gun-metal steel and a Public Enemy song. A five-foot-wide mirror spray-painted with the word "RUN" perhaps asks who's running from whom among art's predominately white audience. A massive shelf unit slathered with black wax supports vessels filled with yellow blobs of shea butter, an urn splattered with gold paint, and such tomes as *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* and *Powers of Healing*, evoking a sense of enervated alchemy. And a golden rectangle, thickly spray-painted onto one of the gallery's rusty windows, is strangely moving, bling as ghostly grace note. *Nicole Klagsbrun*, 526 W 26th, 212-243-3335. Through March 29.

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