

and we have grown comfortable with its disjunctions. What makes this work so intriguing is its willfulness. The trace of the pre-existing image, ghostly and subtended, tampers with the more expected—and less assertive—collage read. What possible connection could there be, for example, among a smiling face, a dozen or so potatoes, a garbage can and a section of landscape? And yet we know from what remains that there is a prior scene in which all of these things have their proper place, and it is a scene to which the artist has paid a great deal of attention. The addition of some casually rendered but evocative shapes—shapes that

refinement of materials and ideas had taken precedence over other concerns. His photo-transfer works on pristine sheets of metal, though technically impressive and innovative sometimes look like well-executed corporate commissions. The "Bycycloids" pieces of 1993 are playful constructions that represent an extension of his fascination with wheeled vehicles, showing off his uncanny ability to breathe new life into ordinary objects. Still, it seemed that the working process had become somewhat predictable and that the spontaneity and rawness that epitomized his work for so many years had been sacrificed for a cool, metic-

ment and fragmentation and a general pictorial coherence are crucial issues in these spare works, often determining their overall effectiveness.

In *Occur*, a flyswatter placed vertically in the center of the painting, like a magic wand or totemic figurine, seems to be the thing itself embedded in a layer of wax. To its immediate right is a group of emblematic images: a Stonehenge formation, a doorway, bolts of fabric, a road barrier. Lying horizontally beneath the flyswatter is a dried-out plant or root, dividing the painting. Pattern and image meld, become inseparable, though specific meaning remains elusive.

Toss and Measure is a spiral of humorous juxtapositions. Sections of brick wall are interspersed with a paint brush, a stack of tires, a classical bust, a piece of bread—all apparently held in place with a hardware-store ruler. Rauschenberg's ability to assemble random images and make them into a visual event remains his unique gift. These modest, gemlike paintings are reminders of the artist's seminal role in both art and design since the 1950s.

—Robert G. Edelman

Peter Alexander at Barbara Mathes

The depicted light in Peter Alexander's paintings might best be described as glowing, pellucid, liquid. His acrylic paintings and works on paper included here, dating from 1985 to '94, are mostly dramatically illuminated night scenes in and around L.A. where the artist resides. Although the city is known for its intense daylight, Alexander's paintings focus on the city's anonymity at dusk in images pared down to contrasting extremes of light and dark. His subjects are derived from momentary glances from the window of a moving vehicle (he takes photographs, but does not paint directly from them).

Though the scenes tend to be rather ordinary—for example, a city seen from a low-flying plane, or a gas station just outside of town—Alexander's handling of paint as aqueous light gives the mundane locales a freshness as well as a somber reality. The pattern of circles and rectangles made by streetlights in *7-11* (1991) resembles, among other things, floodlights

on a movie set. To achieve his effects of spectral illumination, Alexander uses washes that bleed into the surrounding pall like a corrosive acid. One building is so brightly lit that it appears to be consumed by fire, its glare reflected on the pavement below. The eerily deserted street suggests that unscripted events are about to occur.

The headlights coming around the bend of a darkened mountain road in *Los Feliz* (1991) could be a scene lifted from some '40s film noir like *The Big Sleep*. Other paired pinpoints of light randomly placed imply that we are looking through a car windshield. Here, Alexander uses a matte ground tone and gives crisp edges to his shapes to flatten out space; the effect recalls a Robert Moskowitz or one of Ed Ruscha's hard-edged word-scapes.

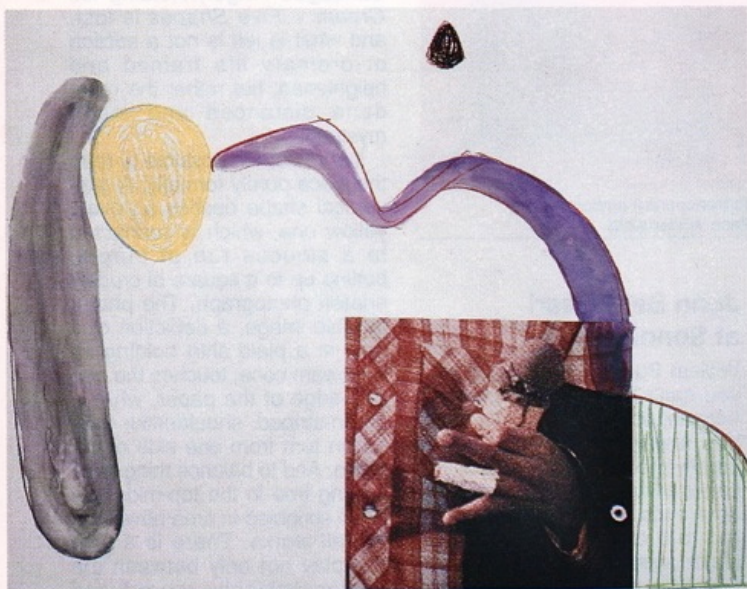
The otherworldly radiance of Las Vegas is the central theme of Alexander's recent work. In one small pastel, *Study for Slots* (1993), the gaudy neon lights of a Vegas hotel form a backdrop for a faux-classical sculpture that beckons to arriving guests. The particular surreality of this desert playground is apparent in *Spades* (1993) in which a looming, out-of-focus fountain depicting Venus stands in front of some strangely luminescent plants. Would that the show had included more than a couple of his Vegas paintings, because it is a subject that ideally suits Alexander's fascination with light as illusion and as a tool of seduction.

—Robert G. Edelman

Paula Hayes at Fawbush

Paula Hayes's recent show at Fawbush encompassed an impressive variety of formats, from installations to Cornell-like boxes on the wall to works on paper. The space became complicated as installations eschewed boundaries, sometimes seeming to overlap. By contrast, *within* individual pieces, subdivisions were often sharply marked by strong black lines.

The installation pieces were intriguing conglomerations of precisely located events. In *Up And Down I Wave Radiant Living*, 4-inch squares of brightly patterned fabric lay on the floor next to a framed aerial view of buildings and roads drawn in ink, as well as some spilled glue and glitter. Higher up, resting on a



John Baldessari: *Hand (With Bandaged Finger), Holding Ice Cream and Five Shapes*, 1994, color photograph, acrylic, oil pastel and pencil on paper, 70 1/4 by 89 1/4 inches; at Sonnabend.

appear to echo missing parts of the photo—does nothing at all to clear up the mystery. These works may seem matter of fact. They are hardly so.

—Richard Kalina

Robert Rauschenberg at Knoedler

Robert Rauschenberg has returned to his characteristic brand of painting in a new series titled "Shales" and in the process he has made some of the most understated, elegant and classical works of his long career. In his last few exhibitions, including the recent show at Castelli, it appeared that a

ulously fabricated product.

The recent paintings (all from 1994) are, in their simplicity and directness as well as their iconography, throwbacks to the early collages of the '50s and the transfer paintings of the '60s, without attached objects. Rauschenberg has devised a technique for using a material called fire wax (in collaboration with Saff Tech Arts) to transfer his own photographic images to canvas with exceptional clarity and brightness. In fact, some are so true to the object that they appear to be utterly real or at the very least, actual photographic prints. Beyond such illusionistic feats, image place-



Robert Rauschenberg: *Occur*, 1994, fire wax and transfer on canvas with painted aluminum frame, 61 $\frac{5}{16}$ by 49 $\frac{5}{16}$ inches; at Knoedler.