

YVETTE DRURY DUBINSKY: Cité des Arts

April 20 – May 19, 2007

PARIS PALIMPSEST

By Harriet Stone

A *palimpsest* is a manuscript, most commonly made of papyrus or parchment, on which one writes again after an initial writing is erased, through washing or scraping. Though she builds her work through images rather than words, Yvette Drury Dubinsky effectively traces and retraces her routes through Paris to capture its patterns and its colors. Three media—watercolor monotype, photography, and digital scanning—record her impressions during a three-month stay at the Cité Internationale des Arts (International City of the Arts) in the heart of the French capital.

The enchantment of Paris beckons, and one can be satisfied with the city's renowned beauty by simply visiting its monuments. For an added touch, one can memorialize the occasion with portraits of various family members in front of the monuments visited. But to those to whom Paris really speaks, those truly caught in the spell of its River Seine and the distinctive architecture of the buildings that border it, the magic of the city does not emerge from the sites that mark the tourist's initial tour. What Paris conveys to the creative imagination is not Notre Dame, not the elegance of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and not even the Eiffel Tower, but rather those things most closely with the Parisians who walk the grand boulevards and navigate the narrow streets, who take the métro, and who buy their produce at the local market.

Dubinsky discovered this Paris as she traveled back and forth to the laboratory where she made her digital prints, to the department-store-that-sells-everything for the plexiglas she used to make the monotypes, and to the factory where she bought the steel backings to hang the finished images. Crossing the city again and again on foot and on the métro, she experienced Paris as a

nexus of interconnecting streets and rail lines. She has translated these grids into a series of watercolors that record layer upon layer of sunlight on the Seine. The water takes on different hues at different times of day, and Dubinsky, in ways that pay homage to Monet and Bonnard, captures how one hour's light is washed away, replaced by another, as the river cuts its path through the city.

The Paris métro is a world apart, yet a world that remains intimately connected to the Parisian way of life. In this vast underground, it is virtually impossible to be lost more than momentarily, since familiar maps, with their distinctive color-coded markings, guide passengers from one station to the next. Taking the subway, and often replicating the same route day after day, Dubinsky produced a compelling photo series that records the comings and goings of métro cars and métro riders as they flow, anonymously, in the artificial light of the stations. The deep stairwells, the hushed passengers, and the motion of the cars caught in the blur of the camera all register how the city reinvents itself every day along the same tracks.

The digital scanner, the modern-day palimpsest machine, reads page after page of texts or illustrations. Dubinsky, however, scans neither texts nor images, but rather vegetables—exquisite, vibrant vegetables from the Paris markets. One look at these images, and viewer knows that Dubinsky has captured French life at its most elemental. Artichokes have fuchsia and magenta tips foreign to their American counterparts. Garlic bulbs, too, have a violet striation and a thick stalk that marks them as European. Fresh almonds, which appear in the markets from June to August, are unfamiliar to us here. Dubinsky captures their

fetching green, velour-like shells, right down to the fuzz of their outer envelopes, as she does the delicate ripple of the *girolles*, the chanterelle mushrooms. But it is the *fèves*--the fava beans--arranged one next to the other like so many little streets or rail lines that remind us most suggestively how Dubinsky has captured in these images, too, the pathways of her discovery of the City of Light.

She followed the fava bean's long, leathery pods directly through the popular Belleville market. In this eclectic space, colors stand out among the produce as among the produce-seekers. Often wearing native dress, new immigrants from North Africa and Asia mingle with bargain-seekers and gastronomes of all stripes hungry for a piece of the world's harvest. *Paris captured in a fava bean*. Dubinsky's experience is not that of Proust's *Madeleine*, the shell-shaped little sponge cake which, when famously dunked in a cup of tea, evoked a host of involuntary memories. But Dubinsky's *fèves* nonetheless remind us of how objects, once captured and celebrated by an artist, can contain a world of paths taken, and retaken.

Dubinsky studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, Santa Reparata Print studio in Florence, The Maine Photographic Workshop and The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts. She has taught at Washington University, The University of Chicago, and at the Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill on Cape Cod. Examples of her work form part of the collections of The St. Louis Art Museum, The Margaret Harwell Art Museum, as well as numerous corporate and private collections around the country and abroad.

A graduate of the Washington University school of Arts and Sciences and the Graduate School of Art,

Dubinsky has exhibited her work frequently in St. Louis and in Truro and Provincetown, Massachusetts, as well as in numerous galleries throughout United States. Most recently, she exhibited her Paris work at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. She also collaborated at another time in Paris with German composer Axel Frank Singer, whose incantatory composition also accompanies the *Métro series video* in St. Louis.

Written by Harriet Stone

Harriet Stone is a writer and professor of romance languages & comparative literature in Arts & Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis and a 2006 faculty fellow. Stone received her doctorate in Comparative Literature from Brown University in 1982. She is the author of *The Classical Model: Literature and Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century France* (1996), as well as *Royal DisClosure: Problematics of Representation in French Classical Tragedy* (1987).

This essay is a series of introductions to the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists and friends.

BRUNO DAVID GALLERY

3721 WASHINGTON BOULEVARD (IN GRAND CENTER) ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63108-3611 USA
314.531.3030 / info@brunodavidgallery.com / www.brunodavidgallery.com