

# ALEXANDRE



John Walker: Installation view of "Time and Tides," 2001; at Knoedler.

the West with caricature, but in Africa with ancestor worship. For the Africans, the "colons" must have had an ambiguous satirical edge, but for Schreuders, a white descendent of the colonial settlers, the adoption of a similar genre of expression is fraught with ironies.

The best piece in the show succinctly incorporated all of this political and esthetic history into a single sculpture. Titled *Conversation* (2001), it consists of two figures approximately 2½ feet tall with nearly life-size heads. The figure on the left is a white woman in sandals, a red skirt and a flowered blouse, her hands clasped behind her back. The one on the right is a black man in an olive-green uniform with red pocket flaps, his hands stuffed in his pockets. They stand angled toward each other, staring quietly off into space, not facing but definitely in contact. The tentative yet unembittered sense of communication between the figures is palpable. Schreuders skillfully uses thin washes of paint with the underlying tones of the bare wood to represent warm dark skin or slightly raw white flesh.

None of the other pieces in the show quite reached the level of *Conversation*, but some were notable nonetheless. *Burnt by the Sun* (2000) was the only fully adult-size figure in the show. A white woman standing barefoot in a white slip examines the back of her sunburnt hands which, along with her lower arms, are painted with a sickly pink enamel. At the "tan line" her skin reverts to the bare

wood, nicely encapsulating the vexed questions of who or what is "native" to her homeland.

In addition, some of Schreuders's sculptures are apparently carved in the wood of trees that were imported to the area by the colonials and are now being rooted out. *Sun Stroke* (2000) is a tableau of a boy asleep on his bed with his dog at his feet and a small crucifixion on the wall behind. The dog's fur is rendered by driving rusty nails into the wood, as though for an African fetish, contrasting the psychological positions of European and African religious traditions in the mind of a colonial. From such a point of view, Christianity must have seemed exalted but distant, while animism and magic were near but alien. Schreuders powerfully locates her themes of alienation and displacement in the actual materials and facture of her art.

—Robert Taplin

## John Walker at Knoedler & Company

"Time and Tides," John Walker's exhibition of new work, was really two shows in one. Half of the dozen paintings were somber, earthen-colored near-abstractions inspired by the beach, rocks and horizon of the Maine coastline. The other works were

predominantly black, white and gray, covered with calligraphy, and devoted to the subjects of war and the artist's father.

The war paintings, a couple of which were nearly 17 feet wide, expanded laterally like graffiti-covered walls. Cursive, wet-into-wet texts—excerpts from the work of English World War I poets David Jones and Wilfred Owen and from Rosanna Warren's 1997 poem *Mud (for John Walker)*—ramble across monochrome fields, sometimes illegibly, like a drunken diary. The poetry, often woven through a painted matrix like a chain-link fence, is juxtaposed with cartoonish figures, reminiscent of Basquiat's imagery, that include Walker's signature sheep-skull-headed man, a stand-in for the British-born artist's father, who was wounded in the trenches.

These big war pictures are not pretty. They have an angry, muddy, blood-and-guts feel. Their power is established through large-scale, expressionist handling and the written word. But the paintings rely too heavily on these constructs. Walker's recurring father figure adds to the paintings' elegiac timbre, but the image remains too specific to suggest a wider meaning. The texts move frustratingly between loud, jostling pattern and an intimate, poetic voice, and are never truly integrated with the figures. Nevertheless, the paintings strike a nerve; they left me feeling uncomfortable, as if I were wit-

nessing something essentially private, like mourning, made theatrically public.

The seascapes, leaden and gritty, were more satisfying. Their stormy, nocturnal pigments of brown, rust, orange and ochre, mixed with black and white, seem to thicken like wet sand. In such works as *Morning Light*, *Ebb Tide*, the turbulent black and orange brushstrokes recall the fiery aftermath of a sea battle.

An oversized biomorphic form—evocative of a tidal pool, hourglass, palette or puzzle piece—appears in each of the coastal paintings. This enigmatic icon, central to the seascapes in both composition and meaning, seems residuary and beyond definition. Like the wandering father figure of the war paintings, it is elusive, spectral. But this newer symbol feels found rather than fabricated, born of the experience of the coast, and has the associative potential to evolve beyond the personal to the universal. —Lance Esplund

## Jon Pylypchuk, a.k.a. Rudy Bust, at Friedrich Petzel

Jon Pylypchuk, a.k.a. Rudy Bust, a Canadian-born artist now living in Los Angeles, built the supports for more than 25 mixed-medium "paintings" presented in this crowded exhibition by screwing rough-edged pieces of scrap plywood onto panels. The grain of the plywood subsequently functions as landscape components, rickety waterfront piers, cramped interiors or even stick figures. Cloth and other materials are collaged onto the panels to create lively scenes. Tiny fabric characters—from dogs to blob-faced beings—spout forlorn philosophical utterances, each remark penciled onto surfaces adorned with cutesy elements like sand or glitter. In this exhibition, the outsiderlike oddness of Pylypchuk's raw, found mediums is most effective when he animates the panels with a recurring heart-shaped character, usually made from a cutout piece of velvet. Indeed, only when that fierce heart-shaped figure steps

Jon Pylypchuk: *mad heart plant*, 2000, mixed mediums on panel, 22½ by 16½ inches; at Friedrich Petzel.

