

Art in America

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Anne Harris and Cynthia Knott at DC Moore

Anne Harris disturbs as much as she charms. A figurative painter of considerable skill, she has concentrated in the past five years on self-portraits and pictures of her young son, Max; the compositions glow with transcendent light, but her harsh documentation of the human form also arouses repulsion. In one portrait of herself from 1996-97, she stands naked and pregnant, her eyes half closed and her mouth slightly open. Her expression is uncanny, nearly threatening. She almost seems to have come from the dead. The unmistakable discomfort we feel on seeing this image comes from Harris's remarkable detail. In her paintings she can seem witchlike, devoted to dark causes, even as she compels admiration for her translucent flesh and riveting gaze.

In her exhibition of recent work, she presented portraits of her son as well as people paint-

ed entirely from the imagination; the same principle of highly realized particulars and general sense of unease obtained. In the small (12-by-12-inch) *Portrait (Little Girl/Pink Dress)*, 2002, Harris's gothic vision is triumphant. A small girl with wavy golden hair and downcast eyes does not convey the innocence that the title suggests. The atmosphere is decidedly creepy. The figure's open mouth, visible teeth, lowered gaze, pug nose and high forehead deliver the impression of menace; everything seems wrong. In *Blond Max* (2001), another small work, Harris depicts her son in profile. He gazes unseeingly off to the right, his huge head causing the suspicion that something is terribly out of kilter, even though the boy is suffused in a lovely yellow-gold light. In *Old Neck Portrait* (2001), a woman's wiry hair frames her face. Like the other subjects, she looks downward, her eyes just barely in tandem. Harris paints otherworldly themes in the guise of simple representation.

"Gardiners Bay" was the title of Cynthia Knott's exhibition, shown in an adjacent room. Knott paints the sea in musical variations. Again and again she

presents a luminous atmosphere in which a majestic, often darkening, sky rises up over water, nearly taking over the painting. Her works are the result of many layers of materials—sizing, gesso, metallic pigments and oils. As she builds up the surface, the ambiance of her seascapes grows more complex. Encaustic's translucence enables her to work out a depth and resonance that are in keeping with her grand theme of water, here localized to depictions of the Long Island shore. In *Red Sea* (2002), a warm, reddish light hangs over a dark-blue expanse of water; the scene powerfully conveys imminent change. Knott has commented, "I prefer to work when conditions are changing, the transition times of day into night, storm into clearing and vice versa." In *Victory* (2001), a large work on linen, the clouds are theatrically powerful, massing on the right and left, above the horizon. Something of Turner's seascapes, where everything appears to be roiling, comes through. Knott is a sharp chronicler of water and sky's endless impermanence.

—Jonathan Goodman



Anne Harris: *Portrait (Little Girl/Pink Dress)*, 2002, oil on linen, 12 inches square; at DC Moore.



Cynthia Knott: *Red Sea*, 2002, oil, encaustic and metallic on linen, 40 by 76 1/4 inches; at DC Moore.