



GREENE NAFTALI

at share motifs.

## Thomas Lawson

'New World'

*Participant*  
253 East Houston Street, Lower  
East Side  
Through July 26

In 1981 the artist and critic Thomas Lawson published an essay in *Artforum* titled "Last Exit: Painting." In it he argued that photo-based painting could be just as pointed and relevant as other forms of appropriation art, and championed the work of David Salle and Jack Goldstein, among others.

That debate has long since fizzled out, and paintings by Mr. Lawson, the dean of the School of Art at California Institute of the Arts, are now enshrined in the "Pictures Generation" show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. And in his most recent works, on view in this downtown solo organized by the Los Angeles curator Lauri Firstenberg, Mr. Lawson seems to have relaxed his defensive stance a bit.

In place of difficult subject mat-

ter, like a battered child in one of his early paintings, he uses aggressive color combinations and spontaneous eruptions of pattern. And the source for his grouped and solo figures with their backs turned isn't a mass-media image; it's Tiepolo's fresco "The New World," updated with casual street shots from Mr. Lawson's camera phone.

In "The New World: Twins" two women are menaced by a mysterious, simian shadow. One wears a white mask and a striated coat that could be a hand-me-down from Jasper Johns. The other is rendered as a lime-green silhouette that pops against the tomato-red background.

Just as eye-catching are the two male figures in "The New World: Stepping Up." Wearing baggy shorts, hands stuffed into their pockets, they appear to be shrugging off a shower of yellow stars.

These are perplexing works.

They embrace the decorative potential of painting, but in a guarded way — as if the paintbrush had to assert its superiority to the smart phone.

KAREN ROSENBERG

## Michael Joaquin Grey

*P.S. 1*

22-25 Jackson Avenue, at 46th  
Street,  
Long Island City, Queens  
Through Sept. 14

An astounding video projection is the main reason to see Michael Joaquin Grey's boutique-size exhibition. Titled "Perpetual ZOOZ," it presents a parallelogram revolving against a yellow background to the accompaniment of a deep, rhythmic thumping sound. When the parallelogram momentarily faces forward you discern a scene from "The Wizard of Oz": black-and-white pictures from Kansas on one side, color images of Oz on the other.

As the parallelogram tips away from the vertical, another dimension comes into view. Highlights and shadows morph into glowing hills and valleys, which throb in rhythm with the thumping sound. The oscillation between cinematic imagery and 3-D topography is visually fascinating and philosophically intriguing. It demonstrates how reality seems to change, depending on how it is processed and the angle from which it is viewed.

Information provided by the museum explains that the sound is a combination of two heartbeats, Mr. Grey's and his mother's. Further, the two parts of "The Wizard of Oz" are running in opposite directions, one forward and the other backward. It sounds complicated, but it all comes together seamlessly to gripping effect.

Mr. Grey's other works, including wall diagrams and a Plasticine clay sculpture of the "Peanuts" character Snoopy in an orange-tinted vitrine, have to do with language and biology. Like Matthew Barney and Keith Edmier, he seems to be working out a comprehensive system comprising autobiography, science and myth. But what he's getting at remains tantalizingly obscure.

KEN JOHNSON