

artbeat

Simon Zalkind, curator of the Mizel Center's Singer Gallery (350 South Dahlia Street, 303-316-6360, www.mazcc.org), has mounted a show, as so many others have, honoring the opening of the Clyfford Still Museum. His entry, which runs through April 29, is the wonderful **Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin**, made up of paintings by Andy Berg. The title is taken from the Bible and translates to "the writing on the wall."

Berg was trained in the '80s, but took a couple of decades off before picking up the brush again. His style refers to classic abstract expressionism, but he also makes lots of references to the abstract end of neo-expressionism, which is where he started so many years ago. It has to do with what was then called "mark making," and Berg's embrace of the method is one reason that Jean-Michel Basquiat will come to mind as you walk through the show.

There are many standouts in this gorgeous

exhibit, especially the title piece, "Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin," a magnificent triptych covered with a range of abstract passages and incorporating enigmatic script and scribbles. Also stunning is "Synchronistic" (detail pictured). Both paintings, and many of the rest, reveal Berg's sophisticated understanding of modernism, with tips of the brush to Matisse, Hans Hofmann and even Arshile Gorky.

For nearly fifteen years, Zalkind has set a high aesthetic standard with exhibitions like this Berg solo, a standard that has apparently not been met by the Mizel's performing-arts division. This was

brought home by the newly unveiled and truly hideous remodel of the building's principal south-facing elevation in order to create a pointless entrance as part of the tacky and pretentious redo of the **Elaine Wolf Theatre**.

The clumsy expressionism of the new remodel collides with the restrained brutalism of what's left of the once-handsome original. Formerly, this side of the building featured two horizontal masses symmetrically flanking a vertical atrium topped by a barrel vault. Now this formal

order is wrecked, with the off-balance addition not being just asymmetric, but anti-symmetric!

As soon as I left the parking lot, I knew what I had to do — go to Walgreens and get some Visine.

— MICHAEL PAGLIA



NOW SHOWING

Clyfford Still. For the opening of the Clyfford Still Museum, founding director Dean Sobel has installed a career survey of the great artist. *Clyfford Still: Inaugural Exhibition* starts with the artist's realist self-portrait and features his remarkable post-impressionist works from the 1920s. Next are Still's works from the '30s, with some odd takes on regionalism and some figurative surrealist paintings. Sobel saw a seed for Still's abstract expressionism in the line following the shoulders of the figures in these works that appears throughout the artist's career. Then there's his first great leap forward as the representational surrealist works give way to abstract ones. Still makes his big break in the early 1940s, becoming the first artist to arrive at abstract expressionism. Seeing so many classic Stills at once is an indescribable experience. Looking at the work dating from the '40s and '50s, it's easy to see why Still is regarded as one of the great masters of American art. Sobel has also done a survey of Still's career in miniature using the artist's works on paper. Through December 31 at the Clyfford Still Museum, 1250 Bannock Street, 720-354-4880, <http://clyffordstillmuseum.org>. Reviewed January 31.



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and because it was a stopover Los Angeles-based conceptualist Ed Ruscha has taken quotes from that novel and created a series of works that incorporate and interpret them in photo-based landscapes or abstracts. The pieces are signature Ruschas, featuring floating text at the picture plane, with the images underneath receding behind it. Ruscha has his own Denver connection, through the massive multi-part mural "A Rolling History of Colorado and the West" in Schlessman Hall at the Denver Public Library. The DAM show is displayed in the Western-art galleries on level two of the Hamilton. Ruscha — and Keroac, for that matter — are thus put into the context of Western art. In this way, the DAM is passively promoting the

once-radical idea that Western art encompasses not just Remingtons, but Ruschas, too, and thereby supporting an ongoing shift in perceptions that's taking over the field. Ruscha is obviously a Western artist; after all, he lives and works in the West. Through April 22 at the Denver Art Museum, 100 West 14th Avenue Parkway, 720-865-5000, www.denverartmuseum.org.

What Is Modern? Department of Architecture, Design and Graphics curator Darin Alfred has put together this large show dedicated to furniture and decor from the early nineteenth to the early 21st century. Alfred has included groundbreaking tables, storage units, lighting and — no surprise here, considering Alfred's specialty — graphics. Laudably, Alfred takes a chronological look at how technological advancements informed the development of modernism, starting with a bent-wood chair from 1808 by Samuel Grogg. Its overall form is very sleek, with a gracefully curving back, but the details are very different, being almost precious, like the little hooves that mark the termination of the legs. One of the newest pieces in the show is "Roadrunner," a chair from 2006 by Colorado's own David Larabee and Dexter Thornton working together as DoubleButter. Made of a cheap synthetic, the chair is nonetheless elegant. In between the two chairs, Alfred has installed a wide assortment of classics from the annals of modernism. Through November 30 at the Denver Art Museum, 100 West 14th Avenue Parkway, 720-865-5000, www.denverartmuseum.org. Reviewed December 23.

Xi Zhang. This small yet strong solo, the full title of which is *11 Ceremonies: New Paintings by Xi Zhang*, features a selection of recent paintings by this young Colorado artist who is a native of China. The paintings have an ambitious quality from several perspectives, including technique, subject matter and, most important, a kind of visual charisma. This final characteristic makes Zhang's works seem more monumental than they actually are — though they are pretty large. Stylistically, Zhang is an expressionist. Among the many strengths of his paintings are the elaborately intriguing surfaces and the strong and widely varied palettes that differ from canvas to canvas. Speaking of colors, Zhang's taste for bold palettes is clear evidence of his origins in Chinese aesthetics, but he's also apparently channeling the recent art history of figuration in America and Europe, making the resulting works extremely sophisticated and interesting. Though it's true that Zhang's in-your-face paintings are not conventionally beautiful, there are many things about them that are. Through April 14 at Plus Gallery, 2501 Larimer Street, 303-296-0927, www.plusgallery.com. Reviewed April 5.

— MICHAEL PAGLIA

