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FEBRUARY 2007

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PHOTO: ANDREW ARNOLD AND GARY GIBBON. ART BY JUDY ANTONINI
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"CONVERSATION," OIL ON CANVAS, 19" x 20", BY ANNA SHALOVEC

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DISCOVERY



"MY LIFE," OIL ON CANVAS, 27" X 24", BY MAROË SUSTI; SEE PAGE 60

Over the past seven-plus years, we've brought you numerous stories about artists who ventured outside their established genres and gave themselves over to adrenaline-pumping moments of serendipity, often propelling them down unexpected paths. This month, you'll meet James Phillips whose spontaneous play with plaster nudged him toward three-dimensional works. We'll also introduce you to three other visual artists who fearlessly follow their instincts: photographer Lisa Brookhart and painters Anna Shakeeva and Maroë Susti. And you'll be treated to a behind-the-scenes peek at the Virginia Opera, just in time for the company's staging of *Agrippina* at George Mason University's Center for the Arts this month.

Also in our February issue, you'll find reviews of the Alex Katz exhibition at The Jewish Museum in New York, as well as two installations at the Old Patent Office Building in Washington: Joseph Cornell's assemblages at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and photographs, prints and posters depicting the celebrated performer Josephine Baker at the National Portrait Gallery.

You won't even have to venture outside the Commonwealth to take part in America's 400th Anniversary celebrations scheduled for this year. But before you finalize any plans, check out our Close to Home feature spotlighting the archaeological discoveries and interpretive exhibits of Virginia's Jamestown Settlement.

Judy Pomeranz is back with Episode 10 of her continuing novella *On the Far Edge of Love: New York Stories*. And Exit Laughing columnist Donovan Kelly surrenders to the realities of February.

Discovery awaits.

—AR

the HUMAN EXPERIENCE



BY JANET SCHARP

“I always used to paint my life, my experiences, how change affected my life,” says McLean oil painter Maroe Sust. “Now, since I came to Virginia, I became interested in the outside world.” Born to an Italian family living in Lima, Peru, Maroe grew up in a multicultural environment. As an adult, she spent some time in Lima, but has lived in the United States since the mid-1980s, when she came to Miami for a visit and decided to stay.



MAROE SUSTI

After living in Miami for nine years, Maroe moved to Seattle and later Atlanta. She came to Northern Virginia in 2000, now working as a senior designer for MITRE Corporation by day and painting in her home studio by night. Maroe spent the month of December back in Lima, visiting her daughter and granddaughter.

Maroe’s interest in art began at an early age. Her mother and aunt were both talented painters, and from the time Maroe was a small child, the two women encouraged her in art. After high school, she earned a B.F.A. in painting from Pontificia Universidad Católica in Lima, Peru, followed by a Certificate in Visual Design from Milan’s Scuola Politecnica di Design (considered the top graphic design school in Italy at the time).

Maroe describes her work as a mix of three different schools of painting: the Italian Renaissance Masters; the Surrealists, especially René Magritte; and the French Symbolists, including Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Odilon Redon and Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer. She also admires Dante Gabriel Rossetti, an English painter known for symbolism and paintings of women, and Gustav Klimt, a German artist especially known for his famous painting, “The Kiss.”

“COURTSHIP,” OIL ON CANVAS, 52” x 72”



The only introspective painting in the series, "My Life," presents a package partially covered with stamps and photos—reminders of her experiences and the places she has lived. Another painting, "Migration," summarizes her concern with the outside world. According to Maro, this painting of dark spots on an orange background represents an aerial view of the planet Earth, showing people moving: "It's a map of the world made with people. People move, people migrate, like I did."

The other *Multitude* paintings portray recent world events and their impact on her. Maro is asking herself, "Would I be in any of these situations?" She wanted to catalog the men, women and children on the earth. The crowds in the paintings depict people of many different races and cultures, but she sees each person in the crowd as an individual. "All these people are one, and yet, each is only one person," she comments.

Each composition started with an actual event. For example, "Courtship" illustrates a news story about rules of courtship in Kyrgyzstan. The men are carrying off a cardboard woman. Because she was kidnapped, she is an unwilling participant and no longer a woman.

"Bystanders" represents the children in the world—big and little children from many different races. The 2004 school siege in Beslan, Russia, inspired this work. "Children are bystanders," says Maro. "They do what grownups tell them to do."

A photograph showing Middle Eastern women dressed in long robes and veils inspired "Crowd of Women." In her original painting, done mostly in blue, Maro imitated the picture of veiled women. Unhappy with this work, she painted a new one over it, depicting a group of happy, lightly clothed, free women.

In "Identity," Maro interprets a newspaper photograph of a



crowd holding peace signs after the 2004 terrorist bombings in Madrid. The blank, flesh-colored signs in Maro's painting have a special meaning. She imagines that the men are pondering whether their own life has any value.

"The Rage," based on a picture of Middle East fighting, symbolizes world-wide strife. Maro explains: "All over the world, men are fighting. If you look at this painting from eye level, you get into it and become one of the crowd. You could be in any of these paintings."

Maro has worked for almost three years on this series of allegories. Each painting takes about three months. She draws the composition first, using a charcoal pencil. She then redraws it with a thin, watery acrylic paint. Next, she paints the entire picture in one color with acrylic paint. Finally, she repaints with different layers of oil. She likes to create a rough background in the finished work.

The oil layers include thick paint as well as what she calls "transparencies." For the transparency layers, she creates a glaze by diluting the color paint. This process gives the oil painting a depth that she cannot achieve with acrylic paint. She often adds retouching varnish after a layer of oil paint dries, before she adds another coat. The



varnish restores the paint color, which may have dulled in drying.

As a change from the heavy subject matter in her *Multitude* series, Maro is currently creating 20-by-28-inch head-and-shoulder portraits in acrylic, using her coworkers at MITRE as models. She calls these works "action paintings."

In addition to mounting numerous solo shows in Lima, Maro also has displayed her work in group shows in Miami and as far away as France and Japan, Mexico, Venezuela and Czechoslovakia. She received a prestigious Dalton Pen Merit Award in 2004. Her work also has been reproduced or mentioned in various publications, including the July 2005 *Communication Arts Illustrator Annual 46*.

See Calendar for details on Maro's current show at the McLean Project for the Arts' Ramp Gallery. For more information, visit www.sustigraphics.com, or contact her at 703-506-8438 or maroes@sustigraphics.com.

FACING PAGE: "CROWD OF WOMEN," 50" X 50"; THIS PAGE, TOP: "BYSTANDERS," 50" X 42", AND "IDENTITY," 72" X 60". ALL ARE OIL ON CANVAS