

Art in America

OCTOBER 2002

Patti Heid
at Walter Wickiser

Patti Heid's latest large-scale canvases combine video- and computer-derived imagery with passages created with acrylic airbrush; beads, sequins and silver bullion applied on top. These visually sumptuous works seemed bent on delivering a point about man's ruination of his environment.

In *Blowing Kisses*, Heid gets right down to ecological cases: the right half of this diptych features a spindly smokestack contentedly spewing industrial fumes into the left. The painting also harbors huge blowups of Rosenquisty red lips and gleaming teeth. The kiss of death? "Smoke gets in your mouth"? Things get more pointed in *Sylvan Sunrise*, which features a stand of trees through which, mightily but hazily, pokes the sun. The air is so thick with pollution that the canvas surface fairly crackles with beads and bullion.

Strangely, these applied substances remain the most painterly- and autographic- elements in these pictures. Heid applies them all by hand, and such craftsmanship adds immeasurable amounts of expression—even self-expression—to the paintings, providing them with a kind of ritualized nuance they wouldn't otherwise have.

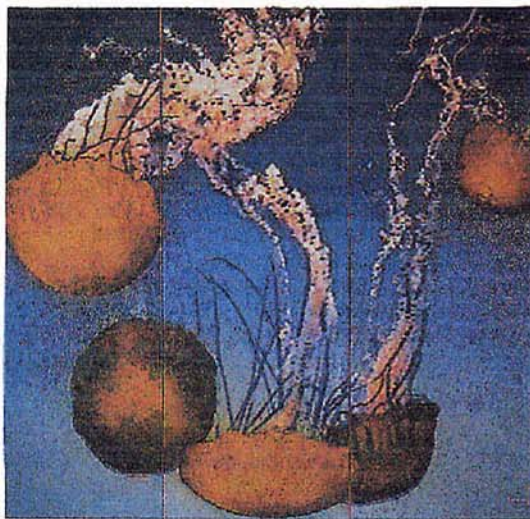
In *Casa del Fuego* (House of Fire), lifelike flames lick at and engulf a demure, seemingly uninhabited house. The flames, upon inspection, reveal their digital source in quivering, closely set lines; the house is another bit of intricate bead-

work. Losing it to fire, the viewer feels, is a tragedy to the artist.

Still, there is a point at which the environmental preachiness starts to read as covert romanticism. The flames are oddly lovely, the fire Wagnerian. As W.H. Auden once wrote, "Every poet loves a disaster." In the triptych *Bouyant Drifters* (2001), the gloom seems to lift: four jellyfish are seen disporting themselves, tops and tentacles swaying in the brine. The picture is an easygoing homage to our aquatic ancestors: it reminds us that our forebears probably began in the depths, as some evolutionists have it; these creatures, at least, seem happy to stay there.

Whatever the topic, the achievement of beauty does not seem to be the artist's goal. Perhaps we should do as D.H. Lawrence suggested: "Trust the tale, not the teller." Read as gigantic lyrical essays, Heid's output is fantastic, funny and often phenomenal.

—Gerrit Henry



Patti Heid: *Bouyant Drifters*, 2001, digital print with airbrushed acrylic and beads, sequins, crystals, silver bullion on canvas, triptych, 89 by 93 inches overall; at Walter Wickiser.