



## ARTS & LETTERS

Abstract Jewels of Modernism  
Gallery-Going

By MAUREEN MULLARKEY  
June 7, 2007

Following the lead of Braque, Picasso, and Gris in the early decades of the 20th century, collage has evolved into modernism's most fertile genre. Just short of a century old, it has outlived the rhetoric of radicalism that hailed its beginnings. It endures as an undisputed gift to visual art.

**Pavel Zoubok's "IN CONTEXT: collage + abstraction"** is an exhilarating overview of the myriad ways collage has paralleled the rise of abstraction and continued to expand pictorial means. Fifty-six modern and contemporary artists are sympathetically grouped by formal relations, not segregated into time periods or art historical categories. Some delicious surprises are on view.

Displaying a generous range of approaches, the show branches, as does abstraction itself, into the geometric and the gestural. Within that divide, styles are limitless. The overall impression is of the fecundity of individual achievement by disparate imaginations in conversation over generations. Sensibility, not style or method, reigns.

The lynchpin of the exhibit is the great Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948). His pasted paper "Lady in Red" (1921) is an elegant microcosm of his Merz abstractions. No more than 4 inches by 5 inches, it is perfectly poised, giving the lie to notions that size is synonymous with aesthetic significance. (Looking at that "lady," keep in mind modes of female street dress at the time.) Two tiny jewels, one by Jacques Villeglé from the 1950s and a recent one by Ken Kewley, affirm the same point: Scale, not yardage, is the vital thing.

Schwitters's Baudelairean ragpicker side is the progenitor of Addie Herder's "Sandpaper Soldier" (1966) and Chris Corales's "Avec 68" (2007), an insouciant arrangement of dejecta. Ms. Herder, once collected enthusiastically by Roy Neuberger and the Hirshhorn Museum, is not widely visible these days. One small, playful piece leaves you eager for more. The same for Hannelore Baron (1926–87).

Anne Ryan's subtle, restrained collages rarely appear on the market. Pieces are scarce and tend to circulate among dealers. This single work from 1950, both painterly and architectonic, revels in the substance of her materials and demonstrates her amplification of Schwitters's example into a thoroughly personal art.

Among the unexpected gratifications in this show are works by Louise Nevelson (1899–1988) and William Dole (1917–83). Nevelson worked extensively in collage before concentrating on sculpture. Her signature absorption with tensions between balance and asymmetry is evident in this quilt-scrap collage. It is a great pleasure to see. So is the rectilinear sophistication of "Citadel" (1978) by Dole, recognized in the 1970s as a master of collage.

The apparent ease of Mario Naves's lyrical chromatic play is misleading. Shapes are unconstrained but the design structure — the controlled distribution of color and tone — holds its own in tandem with Motherwell's hardedged formality. The inimitable Lance Letscher is paired with Adam Fowler. Both create delicate lattices with a gem-cutter's precision, though the emotive weight of color is all on Mr. Letscher's side. John Fraser brings quiet grace to contemporary abstraction.