

Nancy Rubens

Passages

COLLAGE PAINTINGS, 2000–2003

Essays by

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JOSEPH SLIFKA CENTER

YALE UNIVERSITY

80 Wall Street, New Haven, Connecticut

NANCY RUBENS'S collage paintings demand that we juggle our perceptions of fact and illusion, and they make us realize how incredibly rich and varied the art of collage can be. We feel the tension between surface and depth, movement and structural solidity, easily recognizable elements and totally abstract form. Remnants of the present become the past, and remnants of the past are used to construct a new and present reality.

Rubens often begins with a simple brush stroke or a single collage element as an inspiration to build on. She then constructs a foundation that creates an integral structure. The strength of her structure comes from the interplay of abstract form and color with the cultural cues of otherwise ordinary objects from the everyday world— tickets, receipts, foreign money, random papers, newspaper clippings, and evocative, severe, and seemingly distant photographic images—that are embedded into the abstract yet iconographic pictorial spaces.

Rubens deliberately defies the inherent flatness of cubist form. She adjusts the colors until they resonate correctly, creating richly hued painted areas of deep space in which the elements seem to float, spin, or be held. The layered and tilted geometric planes of color also draw our eyes back into the profound depth of that pictorial space. At the same time, the found objects, printed words, and brashly impulsive, winding brush strokes make us aware of the physical surface of the paintings. The intentional disruption of surface and depth creates a textured and fragmented spatial organization with powerful dynamic tension. The spinning movement adds a further complexity to the stately and carefully constructed compositional space.

Slowly, as we allow our eyes to move around and through the layers of papers and washes of paint, we become aware of the careful composition, the heightened attention to color, and the layers of possible meaning. Each scrap of paper, each photographic image, each found object resonates with its own past, each with its own subtlety and richness. Just as there are layers of papers and materials, we begin to sense that there are layers of meaning. Rubens suggests a feeling, an experience, a mood—or perhaps a story, a place, or even a person touching her life. As we sense the inner eye of the artist and feel hints of the matrix of history and association out of which her vision grew, we are drawn into a world of our own associations and history and are inspired to create our own meanings.

The dynamic tension of the composition directs our attention away from the physical construct of the collage to a world beyond the canvas. The multiple layers of visual information trigger our own stream of consciousness, out of which our own individual narratives emerge. Rubens offers us a map to outline a journey of our own creation.

In the works of Nancy Rubens, we are presented with remnants of passages to other places, passages from books, passages of music; we are presented with physical and compositional passages between surfaces and deep pictorial spaces; and ultimately we are confronted with the passage of time and the flow of life itself. It is exactly as she has called it—*Passages*.

Sally Nerber, Director

Brenda Correia, Curator

The Cherry Stone Gallery, Wellfleet, Massachusetts

MOST PAINTINGS CONVEY a visual experience. When I look at Nancy Rubens's collages I am transported beyond the lovely visual images into a world fragrant with the smells of a particular place, evoking unexpectedly remembered sounds, filled with carefully selected fragments that I want to reach out and touch, redolent with recollected tastes. As I delve deeper and deeper, Nancy Rubens makes sure I remember that "the fundamental things apply as time goes by."

Alexander D. Garvin

Professor of Urban Planning and Management, Yale University
New York City Planning Commissioner

NANCY RUBENS'S collage paintings are filled with a variety of possibilities. Any shift of color or collage element can adjust meaning and context. That which has been used or discarded gains new meaning. Ticket stubs to completed performances or end-of-the-line journeys, pages of words read, music played—all find new life in the context of the work. Relationships between seemingly random thoughts flirt with open-ended experiences. Layers of transparent paper appear to waver and float, paint sometimes obscuring the subtle scaffolding upon which both the composition and past and present reside. Overlapping evidence is often bound together by distinct gestures of pigment. Studied and improvisational, finite and infinite, yesterday and tomorrow. Thick and thin. Appeasing and provoking. Studied and intuitive. Nancy Rubens's work takes time. There is much to digest, much to admire. The Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale is delighted to provide a thoughtful environment for these evocative works of art.

Linda Friedlaender

Curator of Education, Yale Center for British Art, Yale University

1. *Pushing Forward*, 2002. Acrylic and collage on linen, 30 x 24 inches



2. *Unbreakable*, 2002. Acrylic and collage on linen, 30 x 24 inches



3. *Free Speech*, 2001. Acrylic and collage on wood panel, 14 x 11 inches



4. *Enter*, 2002. Acrylic and collage on paper, 3½ x 4½ inches



5. *Dusk*, 2000. Acrylic and collage on paper with wax, $3\frac{7}{8}$ x 4 inches



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