

Raynor, Vivien. "ART; After the Volcano Exploded," *The New York Times*, 14 October 1990.

# The New York Times

ART

## ***ART; After the Volcano Exploded***

By Vivien Raynor

Oct. 14, 1990

A STAR among volcanoes, Krakatoa, in Indonesia, erupted in 1883. The explosions were heard thousands of miles away; a tidal wave 120 feet high devastated the shores of neighboring islands, Java and Sumatra, killing 36,000 people.

There was ash enough to plunge the region into darkness 57 hours and, upon reaching the upper atmosphere, it circled the globe for a year or more, causing sky glares and sunsets spectacular enough to inspire Tennyson. In "St. Telemachus," he wrote that "through many a blood red eve/The wrathful sun glared."

The skies on view at the Montclair Art Museum came in the wake of Krakatoa, and though there is no wrath to speak of, the one that is an explosion of yellow light over rocks and water is meteorologically unusual. Watercolors as small as the explosion was huge, they are almost certainly the work of Charles Parsons (1821-1910), although the absence of a signature makes his son Charles R. Parsons a possible candidate.

Either way, these 28 little gems of seascapes were done in Long Island and Maine. A gift to the museum from the artist's great-granddaughter, Mrs. William C. Ridgeway, the show evokes a time when museum visitors were allowed to make their own discoveries and museum guards could safely doze on the job.

The elder Parsons, by the way, was art editor at Harper's Magazine from 1862 to 1889, during which time he worked with illustrators like Homer, Remington, Howard Pyle, Thomas Nast and A. B. Frost. He came from England as a boy (with six sisters) and began his career as a lithographer apprenticed to George Endicott in Manhattan. His fame in Montclair is from having lived there in the 1860's, thus blazing a trail for the artists' colony there, which included George Inness.

The show continues through Feb. 10; the museum is at 3 South Mountain Avenue and its hours are 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and 2 to 5 P.M. Thursday. On the second and fourth Thursday of the month, however, the museum is open from 2 P.M. to 9 P.M.

The explosiveness missing from Parsons's watercolors can be found in "Legacies," a show by well-established blacks and their proteges at the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts, in Summit. On second thought, fragmentation may be the better word, since the impression over all is of many disparate elements barely held together by the glue of politics.

Then again, when taken one by one, most of the artists contest this impression. Mel Edwards, for example, is represented by half a dozen "Lynch Fragments," the weldings of found metal objects that speak so eloquently of the black American past because they are first-rate art. The sculptor is less expressive in the two free-standing arrangements of plates, rods and ingots supported by semicircles cut from plate. But his emotions are never less than heroic.

Mr. Edwards's protege, Juan Sanchez, on the other hand, makes his political disaffection the subject of his art. His amalgams of paint and collage applied to panels involve the repetition of symbols - fat red hearts surmounted by crosses, reproductions of the American eagle and of the Puerto Rican old master Ramon Frade's famous peasant farmer walking barefoot and so on. Painted, printed and repeated over and over, the images are interspersed with writings, one an angry outburst of Malcolm X, others laments in Spanish about the artist's Puerto Rican and African background.

Day after day, the news media prove that with constant repetition, evil loses its power to shock. Yet Howardena Pindell, whose early collages of color postcards and reproductions stop the viewer cold with their beauty and intricacy, now makes her imagery journalistic (and therefore disposable) by introducing phrases like "buried alive" and "double standard." Painted on unstretched canvas, the words mingle with the outlines of the artist's own body, snatches of collages and strokes of impasto applied in groups of four.

They are not without beauty, these "swamps" that give up their contents so reluctantly. Nevertheless, they suggest that Ms. Pindell, like most politically motivated contemporaries, could do worse than rediscover Goya's "Disasters of War."

The artist chosen by Ms. Pindell, Martha Jackson-Jarvis, derives inspiration from African art and occasionally includes animal-like forms made of flattened pieces of copper. Otherwise, she is a maker of turbulent Abstract Expressionist reliefs, using sheets and scrolls of paper dappled with white and colors and many small cubes of colored stone and glass, the ingredients of mosaic.

The chaos of the times is in this work, yet it assumes a kind of order when seen at a distance. Miss Jackson-Jarvis shows a good deal of sculptural talent. Alvin Loving's spirals, cages and tongue shapes, cut from paper and enameled with solid colors, stripes, checkers and spatter, defy analysis. Though hung on the wall like reliefs, these exuberant conglomerations are what Pollock might have done if moved by the spirit of Pop.

Mr. Loving himself has found a kindred spirit in Gregory Coates, who produces boisterous collage-paintings, dribbling and slashing his pigment, slapping on slats of wood, stretches of corrugated cardboard and, here and there, adding rope, a strip of metal, a length of hose.

The show was organized by Nancy Cohen and Cathy Kimball. It comes with a catalogue essay by Lowery Sims, and it stays through Oct. 27. The center is at 68 Elm Street in Summit. Hours are noon to 4 P.M. weekdays and 2 to 4 P.M. weekends.