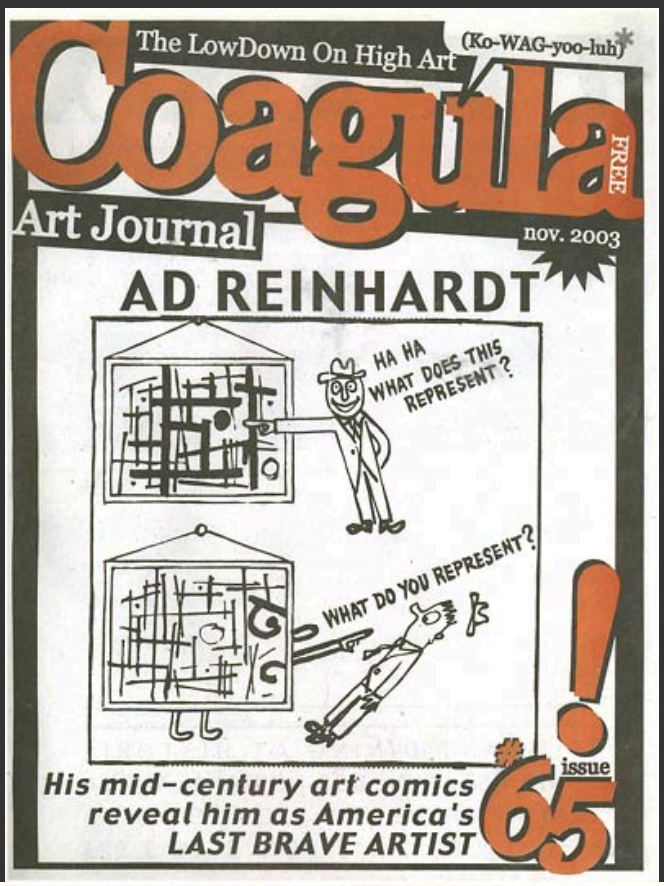
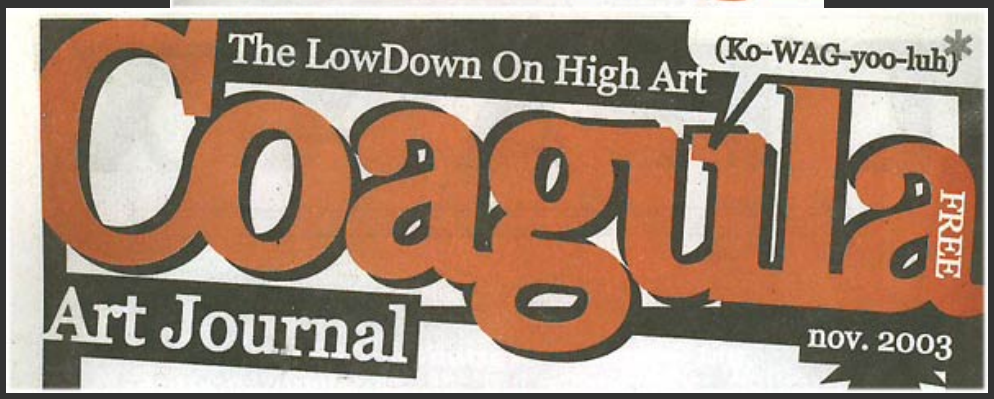
NEW PAINTINGS
BEST OF SESOW (un-Sold)
Paintings (2000-2004)
Bulgaria (2002)
Paintings (2000-2001)
Solomon Islands and Bulgaria
Paintings (1994 - 1998)
Short Film
Shots from Shows
In the Studio
Interviews and Articles
Biography
Contact Sesow.com
Sesow.com

November 2003: Coagula Magazine (Los Angeles)
by Shana Nys Dambrot





DAMBROT...

Which brings us to a bizarre spoken word experiment at Theatre of NOTE, "fucking wasps", wherein the writer/director Steve Morgan Haskell was apparently bent on presenting an overt case of psychosexual repression as a viable worldview. Kinsey is most famous as the author of the so-called "Kinsey Report" a.k.a. Sexual Behavior in the Human Male. I think what the play wanted to accomplish, and what makes it relevant to our consideration here today, is to express the idea that Kinsey's obsessive brand of scientific inquiry could only have unfolded with the dawn of the 20th century, and only as the result of an intensely suppressed sexual identity, coupled with a progressive, scientific mind dedicated to overturning precisely that sort of suppression. He was the perfect case study for a symbolic anthropology of the last fifty years, informed and constructed from untenable opposites: Religious dogma and sexual liberty, science and faith, reason and love, truth-telling and popularity. His mind was a brilliant house divided against itself, and in the end it could not stand. Possibly in service of this idea, the actors' deliveries were by and large didactic and expository rather than evocative. They explained their positions to one another endlessly, and with too much angry insistence. They failed to listen to one another. The warm and often naked bodies on stage were in various stages of mortal combat with inhibition, and just about everyone ended up on the losing side. Sound familiar?

But there was an answer there that I wasn't looking for. The set consisted essentially of a blue piano and several immense paintings by D.C.-based artist Matt Sesow, which were commissioned by the director for the production. These complex, savage, allegorical portraits not only represented but actually contained the entire psychological subtext of the play. Their vivid, unsettling presence gave the rigid agony of the performances a context and a dignity that despite their best intentions they might not have achieved otherwise. The art was there to say no, that despite the defenses, controls and masks, inside everyone there is a mass of turmoil and contradiction. The paintings were an integral part of the content of the production, not just its style. They said more about the Kinsey the man than Kinsey himself ever could. That is exactly what I was looking for at the LA Art Show, what I look for all the time now. For art that takes the human condition seriously, and engages with it, even at great risk to itself. Sesow puts it this way, and I'm sure some of the spirits haunting Santa Monica's Barker Hangar that weekend would agree: "It's a good time to paint, at least [for an artist] like me,

continues on page 36

DAMBROT...

working from the emotional subconscious arena of my brain. People today have more data, more information. People die in war, people lie and it's immediately exposed. American artists that question our policies are in tune with the rest of the world, and they will be significant." These paintings go a long way toward clarifying not only the play's message and moral, but more broadly the role painting has played in the investigation of the fractured human consciousness as it has struggled to redefine itself in one of the most turbulent periods of human history.

All paintings copyright Matt Sesow.