

# Art in America



**Valentina DuBasky, *Syntax*.** 90" x 98", paint and plaster on panel, inches; at Cheryl Pelavin

## Valentina DuBasky at Cheryl Pelavin

by Gerrit Henry

Dubasky's "new cave paintings" are the least visually direct, yet most materially evocative, of those of 20 years showing in New York. While the artist is still putting out the primevally handsome, Lascauxlike, single-figure stags, bulls and bisons of former years, Lascaux itself has taken center stage in the large part of her work.

First things first, however. Also on view at Pelavin was a series of new monotypes (made with Pelavin the Printer before she became Pelavin the gallerist last spring), with the overall title of "Materia Medica." The prints were based on Dubasky's own researches into the healing properties of different botanicals as revealed in pre-20th-century European and Indian texts, and supplied at least some of the energy – and some of the imagery – for the much larger paintings. A good example was the print titled *Materia Medica* itself, against varying-sized, cut and torn papers of light-brown shade was impressed a sprig of a botanical, the very real promise – and the real source – a physical and perhaps psychic healing right here, in situ, before the viewer's eyes. The effect of the sprig was both sprightly and wan, with little clay-reddish imprints of further almost fossilized blooms scattered around the sheet.

The holistic sensibilities Dubasky was drawing on in her "materia" series were obviously ancient, but perhaps not as ancient as the aesthetic prowess manifested in the paintings. Working in a medium that amounted almost to a Paleolithic fresco technique – paint on, in an over plaster, all of this backed by panel – the artist carried the trans-vegetal themes of the prints many steps further in vigorously dense, rigorously lyrical plastic approximations not only of natural landscape on cave walls, but the human imagination itself, perhaps even some illuminated corner of the human psyche.

Given the primal and fabulous nature of that deep psyche, Dubasky's is necessarily a fierce, yet enlightening, incisive, yet atmospheric engagement with her surface. In the diptych *Syntax*, foreground and background of both panels become sinuously, sonorously one is brown, red and creme pigments cohabit and collide, giving off light at the areas of most collision and both obscuring and articulating the botanical and fossil elements – here seen in petroglyphic form – we've come to know from the prints. In both *Syntax* and in the off diptych *Site*, a further botanical element dominates the proceedings: huge, exclamation-pointlike seed pods in red or black, bearing the seeds, potentially, of a new world order, or those of some even more wondrous, cosmetic debacle.

In a very real sense, the process is the painting, with, though, much left to visually mull over. Interpretation is left almost entirely up to the viewer. Dubasky's psychic spaces actively haunts the individual imagination with vestiges of its own imagistic powers, and perhaps no more interpretation is needed. Indeed, when the artist became a little more pointedly landscapeish than usual – as in the paper-on-board *River* – one continue to read this kind of smaller work – sans seedpod and glyphs – is almost literally alive with other than-landscape possibilities.

Whatever the exact view, Dubasky's vision is, for all its abstractness, somehow sure, her site being aligned with deep insight. We may miss the archetypal bisons and stags – and even the goats and monkeys of later work – but this is an artist whose inner worlds are never worlds apart, and who also seems to have inner worlds to spare.

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