

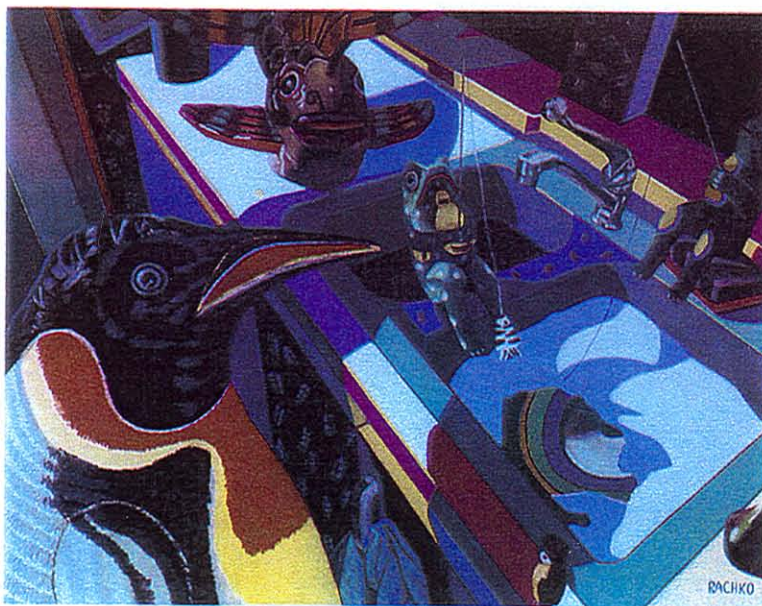
**"His Mortal Enemy Was Poised, Ready to Strike"**  
Pastel on Sandpaper  
58" x 38"

## Exploring The Darker Corners

Barbara Rachko's work reflects three places: her 29th Street Manhattan studio, her sense of home (currently ensconced in a small Greenwich Village walk-up apartment); and that inner sense of place that incorporates Latin American travels with a severely organized background and present. Her conjuncture of these personal locales and an obsessive undertow of exotica and darkness (super ego, ego and id?) -- results in dramatic dreamscapes as akin to outsider art as the cinematic intentions of more hackneyed art world beacons such as Hockney, Fischl, and Sherman.

The plastic elements of modern life are given momentary yet momentous narratives in Rachko's large pastels: domestic arguments, *noirish* stand-offs, sullen cold wars ala Raymond Carver, heroic battles frozen at the moment of mythification are all depicted in claustrophobic apartment settings: the kitchen, the bedroom, the bath, the living room's futon corner. Yet the characters are repertory: dolls and brightly colored Guatemalan *tchotchkes*. The colors are bright pastels. There is an abundance of black. Design is at hand. Size is overblown. Set-ups are static and photographic.

To follow Barbara Rachko's *oeuvre* is to invite quick-quotes from the big voices of art theory. The once-again reviving Schopenhauer pointed out the way in which art opens doors to our culture's "in-itselfness." Aristotle noted beauty's role as a definer of emotion. Plato questioned the artist's role in depicting true life via its shadows.



**"Scene Five: Kitchen"**  
Pastel on Sandpaper  
20" x 26"



## Barbara Rachko



**"Scene Six: Living Room"**  
Pastel on Sandpaper  
26" x 20"



**"Scene Seven: Living Room"**  
Pastel on Sandpaper  
26" x 20"

Rachko speaks freely of her giant, meticulously worked paintings (despite their pastel forms) in terms of process: annual trips to exotic locales (reminiscent of an earlier generation of Graham Greenes, D.H. Lawrences, Malcolm Lowries and Georgia O'Keefes travels into Central America for spiritual exegesis) cull images of dark mysteries the artist finds emblematic of even darker internal elements just out of reach within herself.

She builds tableaux of these creatures within her home and lives with them for weeks, months, until stories appear and grow natural. She refines and photographs the settings, then slowly recreates and adjusts the photographs to match her chosen world of artistic materials. The result is discomfiting because of the actual components of each individual work.

Barbara Rachko is an artist in flux. She's been painting for only a dozen years, having come to her new "career" from a previous one in the U.S. Navy. At a point in her 30s, she says, Rachko decided to take art classes. She found herself drawn to pastels. She started doing portraits and still-lives to make money. The new work evolved slowly. The result is refreshing in that Rachko is working with an intensity that defies the practiced individualism of many of her more successful compatriots. Somehow, a large specter of mystery remains in her works. They encapsulate and dramatize the unexplainable.





**"He Was So in Need of Botany"**  
Pastel on Sandpaper  
58" x 38"

Rachko jettisons psychiatry for something close to Catholic epiphany. To return to trilogies, they speak to the Holy Ghost, a world devoid of sun/Son. I suspect there's much growth from this point in her career. Where it'll take her, or we, her audience, cannot be predicted. Her work, and career, mirrors the acumen of a recent quote from an equal *artiste savant* from the world of film, Werner Herzog.

Asked in a recent interview whether he'd ever thought of entering analysis to better understand the depths of his works, the ever-iconoclastic Herzog guffawed and stated that American's fascination with such pursuits was positively infantile. "If you look into an apartment that's over-brightened with fluorescent lights you'll never want to live there," he said. "We need dark corners to keep things inviting." Barbara Rachko's work speaks to the same effect. It's its strength... and its promise.

by Paul Smart