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"THIS IS A TEST," 2007
Matthew Heller
 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 45" X 48"
 PHOTO COURTESY OF DCA FINE ART

of which are studies for three of the four others—from the new *Dancing With Misfits: Eye-Dazzler* series. Perhaps the thought was that the new pictures are even denser than Caroompas' normally info-intensive paintings and needed breathing room. In fact, they talk to one another with such fervor that they invite crowding, and always have.

There is nothing pure or elegant about Caroompas' approach to picture-making; she abhors a vacuum and fills her canvases with appropriated—but exquisitely hand-rendered—images like a mad scrapbooker. She thus courts visual overload: that is, the pleasure of seeing too much at one time and having it make sense more as hallucination than as narration. Still, the pictures do make sense, thanks primarily to their lucid, carefully balanced compositional fundamentals. Caroompas relies on the symmetrical logic of Pattern Painting to clarify her welter of references and the decorative elaborations that knit them together. She does not indulge in pictorial excess for its own sake; rather, she undergirds her paintings with highly logical, even stately, compositional strategies, and the pictures gain power from the friction between their structural cohesion and discontinuity of meaning.

Back in the day, Caroompas' delight in maximality was considered a Hollywood-inspired response to neo-expressionism. But the recent burgeoning of "lowbrow" art provides a truer context for her figure-fetish and linearrhea. Long responsive to baser forms of visual culture, Caroompas got her body tattooed in the early '80s, and her emphatically graphic painting style clearly manifests her fondness for the "traditional" vocabulary of American tattooing and its

"45000 X DISASTER" (SONGS ABOUT CALIFORNIA AND THE DEVIL), 2008
Tim Sullivan
 MIXED MEDIA
 DIMENSIONS VARIABLE

willing embrace of excess. Her pop references and thickets of embellishment also bespeak the influence of hot-rod and surfboard stylizing, at least as funneled through the downer-and-dirtier art of tattooing.

Caroompas undeniably builds a shock element into her work. But she is not out to shock just for shock's sake. Hers is an art that at once preaches and practices idiosyncrasy. Her eccentricity is no pose, and her investment in an art of roiling, ecstatic non sequitur is manifestly thoroughgoing, and nothing if not vintage. Caroompas is the latter-day feminist version of a dandy, a biker-chick deconstructionist who constructs pictures out of every bit of information around her.

—PETER FRANK

LOS ANGELES

Matthew Heller: **"Everything is a Love Story"** **at DCA Fine Art**

Los Angeles painter Matthew Heller is on the verge of making it big; the thick lines and vibrancy of his trademark lexicon of sensual, roughly-formed nudes in silhouette have garnered increasing attention from critics and collectors, and inspired near-fanatical devotion among his fans. Which is why his most recent show, "Everything is a Love Story," is so refreshing. Half a dozen mini-series riff on aspects of romance, his enduring topic, and in each of these he takes a fresh risk. The expansiveness of his technique indicates an earnest desire to push his own boundaries and leave his comfort zone. It doesn't always work—the text-only pieces fall flat and passages of extreme expressivity are here-and-there disruptive and distracting rather than eloquent—but more often it succeeds.

Love Story Strangers Fiction and the related *This is a Test* series (all 2007) are done on black backgrounds and feature the silhouetted figures, curt text, and rough-hewn graffiti flavor familiar to fans of his previous

work but in a darker, more muscular hand. They form something of a transitional moment, with multi-panel friezes such as *A Beautiful Disaster* and *The Adoration of Young Lovers* indicating an emerging refinement of his compositional ambitions and deepening of his literary impulses. Using a more fraught and complicated symbolism including skulls, crowds of figures, abstract architectural elements, color fields and more variety in brushwork, move the narrative convincingly and completely. They are character arcs, not snapshots.

Series B, especially *Naïve Yes, Stupid No*, introduces a whole new direction for Heller, quantum physics. Into the vagaries of romantic misadventure and self-discovery, Heller folds free-floating atomic signs, geometrical representations of the fourth dimension and references to theories (especially String Theory) about parallel universes. It works well, adding variety, surprise and mystery both in form and content. Brian Greene wrote in his seminal and notably accessible volume on String Theory that "The most accurate measuring devices in the world confirm that space and time are not experienced identically by everyone. Einstein's special relativity theory resolves the conflict between our intuition about motion and the properties of light, but there is a price: individuals who are moving with respect to each other will not agree on their observations." Apparently, one doesn't have to be a physicist mapping and parsing the properties of the universe to sense the truth of this statement—one needs only to have been in love.

—SHANA NYS DAMBROT

LOS ANGELES

Tim Sullivan: "Perfect Entrance" **at Steve Turner Contemporary**

Photographer and video artist Tim Sullivan first came to wide attention with his dynamic appearance in last year's California Biennial. With his new solo exhibition at

