

Robert Mahoney

A colorful kimono'd geisha girl, of the kind art has seen in woodblocks proverbially influential to the French Impressionists, steps up to a bar in the Theme Park remnants of the Wild Est. The sad social history of Asian women immigrants in the Old West tags her for a working girl gone straight and now bored. Her presence equates Western History and the history of the Wild West in the US: she comes on like a "shining" of a poltergeist not yet exorcised, a figure of issues not yet resolved.

The Western rhetoric that is out front in KK Kozik's work comes on as the talk of that side of the bar as well: not "City Slicker" commentary, but local lore, rich with a sense of the hallucinatory slowness and even Sisyphean struggle involved in the fight to overcome stereotypes in history.

Kozik's setting—dude ranches out West—relates to the history of such ranches in this century, first as quickie divorcee farms (I'm thinking of a June Allision movie), then as fantasy cattle rancher resorts. Her work bounces off the image of women out West as epitomized by Jane Russell, crossdressed up as Calamity Jane, playing the man to Bob Hope's cross-dresser in "Paleface," but still packing a secret wallop of raw sex as Howard Hughes exploited it in "The Outlaw." There is a lot of the "great gal" of such movies in Kozik's feminism. The indication of this rugged individualism is in the style of painting.

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In the Geisha Girl painting, there are indistinct little paintings behind the bar. Any old keepsake, sweet, charming Sunday painter masterpieces—as you see in any bar, like a trophy, proof that this here is no "kulchur gulch."

Surely Kozik's crisp, fresh style, her keen eye for detail, her concise ability to find "figures of speech" for her style (in her attraction to cut out signs, gateways, and strings of light on a cactus—a sparkle on prickliness that perfectly bespeaks the style), rep-



KK Kozik Cultural Anthropology #3, 1992 32x29" oil on linen

SISYPHIAN STRUGGLE

Transporting "Figures of Speech" Beyond the Kulchur Gulch

resents the reach for "high art" status of a painterly tradition going back to Taos without any detour to New York.

As a result, the work feels like it has grown out of its subject matter, and the culture it illustrates and deconstructs as once. It does not impose, project, or expose, but chews over the tough, persistent issues of hidebound cultur-

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al turf. This is not pie in the sky and there is no big city free-basing here.

The relation between the culture and style is so good that Kozik's feminism plays out as plausible, as real not ideal. This integration gives the seemingly "easy" work (pictures of the resort life) its surprising integrity.