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Zuka's Birds and other Creatures: 2007

On first glance, the range of paintings in Zuka's 2007 exhibition seems invariably bright, cheerful and reassuring. These richly colored, exuberantly interwoven canvases, uniting a profusion of birds, animals, foliage and flowers in decorative harmony would seem to constitute a contemporary version of the traditional Earthly Paradise theme, conditioned to the jumpier rhythms and more measured optimism of the present. Certainly, this impression is far from a deceptive one. But there is more at stake in Zuka's paintings, a greater ambiguity of meaning and expression woven into the colorful, edgy patterning of her formal language and thematic choices. First of all, in terms of iconography, Zuka's subjects are far from universally cheerful. She tends to depict the more unpopular, common birds: pigeons, sparrows, gulls, magpies. Some of these, are in fact, considered by most people as pests rather than charmers. Zuka depicts these avian outsiders as birds of character, as it were. At times, as in *Les corbeaux et le champ labouré* (46 x 31,9 in.) she contrasts the dark unloveliness or outright menace of the protagonist bird, perched menacingly on a rail in the foreground, confronting the spectator almost eye-to-eye, with the decorative scattering of smaller crows against the pink plowed field in the background and the two wheeling birds in the sky. At other time, the crows may simply function as contrasting motifs in a snow scene, as they do in *Corbeaux sur la neige* (23,6 x 47,2 in.), where the black forms of the birds, strikingly deployed against the white drifts on a horizontal surface at once recall Chinese painting and Monet's exemplary *Pie dans la neige*. Still another variant of the crow theme, very different in both format and expressive effect, is the vertical canvas, *Matin enneigé à Saint-Brancher* (39,4 x 25,6 in.), where the dark, angular birds are set off against the rounded colorful shape of the perky robin, amid marshmallow drifts, the whole strikingly foiled in the background by the flat, pink wall of the artist's studio.

Human beings add to the complexity of meaning and decorative intensity of the two largest canvases in the show, both 77,1 x 51,2 in. In *Béatrice et le forestier*, a magpie with outspread wings, like the Holy Spirit in an Annunciation, comes zooming in at the left-hand upper corner, to join the tightly packed confluence of birds, flowers, foliage and cats flanking the two principal figures. Beatrice, on the left, a sort of sexy, purple pants-clad Virgin, carries a basket of logs; the Forest Ranger on the right, a handsome, green-eyed green-shirted angel of the Annunciation on the right carries a long-handled sickle and has an electric saw hanging from his belt; both are enmeshed in a tangle of yellow, red and orange flowers and dark, angular branches, a posse of black-and-white cats at their feet, bright yellow chickadees perched on the tree to the right. Yet despite the brilliance of the color and the buoyant plenitude of the composition, all is not perfect harmony in this contemporary hortus conclusus. The annunciatory bird is a magpie, traditionally connected with bad tidings rather than joyous ones; the Forest Ranger holds a scythe, an attribute of Father Time symbolizing inevitable death, as well as a saw, instrument of nature's destruction in today's ecologically minded ideology, and the virgin-figure displays, beneath her ample bosom, the fruits of destruction: freshly cut logs. And at the very heart of the piece, a white and black cat looks up hungrily at three little birds on the winding pathway. The composition itself, far from rehearsing the serene formal surface harmony of the medieval tapestry it first brings to mind, is aggressive, spiked by eccentric assonances and jagged, emphatic brushwork.

The cat plays a starring role in two other memorable canvases. In one, *Ezrael chasse le papillon* (35,9 x 25,6 in.), her son's adolescent feline, Ezrael, long of leg and slinky of torso, stands on its hind legs in a field of goldenrod, eagerly hunting an elusive butterfly. In another, *Ezrael voit le chardonneret* (39,4 x 19,7 in.), the same cat, who had never been loosed in nature before, looks up longingly at a goldfinch perched on a giant sunflower. The presence of the cat, though charming rather than ominous, hints at the disharmony underlying the apparent perfection of the natural order.

In still other canvases, it is the dynamism of bird life, avian soaring and wheeling rather than the birds' sedate existence as part of a stable floral tapestry that is the theme: this is particularly true of the artist's take on sea-birds. In a big canvas of *Vol de pélicans et de mouettes* (35 x 45,6 in.), a California theme, both species are shown wheeling over a run of fish. The grotesquely heavy seagull throws its prey up in the air and the lighter, faster seagull catches it in his beak. The textures of the two opposing birds contrast, heavy, richly textured brown feathers against lightly adumbrated white ones, foiled by the dark green background of water. In still another California sea-bird canvas, *Les mouettes arrivent* (39,4 x 39,4 in.), a theme Zuka deployed for a memorable mural at the New York Alliance Francaise, the energy of the painted strokes and the plunging perspective at the top, impart a sense of uncanny dynamism to the wheeling, plummeting, zooming gulls, rendering their movement palpable in formal terms.

While many of Zuka's canvases depict groups of birds, either in the company of their own kind or in conjunction with other species — I am thinking particularly of another California painting, *Le matin à Hermosa* (39,4 x 39,4 in.), with its seductive troop of sandpipers in the foreground, gulls well back against the ripple of sandy, pink shore and the blue water — other pictures can only be thought of as individual bird portraits: the three little canvases of individual orangey-pink, black-beaked flamingo heads are indeed sophisticated decorative close-ups of members of this photogenic species. For a full-length flamingo portrait, Zuka elongates the support into a long, vertical format to accommodate the subject's long legs.

What is striking, then, about this group of paintings by Zuka is not merely its decorative and coloristic exuberance, although there is plenty of that to be sure, but rather the range and variety of the artist's approach to the life, habits and appearance of birds, or

of nature more generally. I am referring to the varieties of formal languages deployed, to the moods evoked, and not least important, the scale and format of the canvas supports themselves, which move from the near-miniature in some of the bird portraits to ambitiously large-scale, from exaggeratedly horizontal to assertively vertical in accordance with the compositional variables of her subjects. In insisting on the visual and sentimental value of the despised pigeon, as in the wonderfully all-over patterning of *Midi: boulevard Pasteur* (25,6 x 35,9 in.), or the aesthetic seductiveness of the lowly sparrow, as in the inventive *Moineaux dans l'althea* (39,4 x 19,7 in.) or the poignant beauty of the maleficent crow, as in the large-scale *Deux corbeaux dans la glycine* (39,4 x 39,4 in.) with its Far Eastern spareness of linear décor, the crows shining out darkly against the pinkish mauve foil of the background, Zuka is making a kind of covert political statement as well as an aesthetic one. She is making a plea in paint on canvas on behalf of a marginalized but visually fresh and appealing group of denizens of the natural world. Attention must be paid, as it must to human beings in the same circumstances.

Linda Nochlin

Les oiseaux de Zuka et autres créatures : 2007

A première vue, les tableaux que Zuka présente dans cette exposition paraissent tous lumineux, joyeux et rassurants. Ces toiles aux couleurs éclatantes, aux entrelacs exubérants, à la profusion d'oiseaux, d'animaux, de feuillages et de fleurs unis dans une harmonie décorative pourraient constituer une version contemporaine du Paradis terrestre, thème traditionnel soumis ici à des rythmes plus nerveux et à l'optimisme plus modéré de notre époque. Mais au-delà de cette impression, certes fondée, les peintures de Zuka révèlent une plus grande ambiguïté de sens et d'expression tissée dans le motif coloré et tout en contrastes de son langage pictural et de ses choix thématiques. Tout d'abord, l'iconographie de Zuka est loin d'être joyeuse. Elle s'attache à représenter les oiseaux les plus impopulaires, les plus communs : les pigeons, les moineaux, les mouettes, les pies, que la plupart des gens considèrent comme des animaux nuisibles. Zuka peint ces outsiders volatiles comme des oiseaux de caractère. Parfois, comme dans *Les corbeaux et le champ labouré* (117 x 81 cm), elle oppose le côté sombre, dénué de charme et menaçant de l'oiseau au premier plan, qui défie le spectateur, perché sur une clôture, et, à l'arrière-plan, des corbeaux plus petits dispersés de façon décorative sur un champ labouré rose. Ailleurs, comme dans *Corbeaux sur la neige* (60 x 120 cm), les oiseaux servent de motif contrasté sur un paysage enneigé où leurs silhouettes noires déployées de façon saisissante sur le fond blanc de la surface horizontale font immédiatement penser à de la peinture chinoise et au remarquable *Pie dans la neige* de Monet. La toile verticale *Matin enneigé à Saint-Brancher* (100 x 65 cm), très différente à la fois par son format et son expressivité, est encore une autre variation sur le thème du corbeau. La forme arrondie aux couleurs vives du sémillant rouge-gorge met en valeur les oiseaux sombres et anguleux parmi les arbustes ployant sous la neige, et l'ensemble se détache de façon saisissante sur le mur rose et plat de l'atelier de l'artiste.

Dans les deux plus grands tableaux de l'exposition (196 x 130 cm), les êtres humains ajoutent à la complexité du sens et à l'intensité décorative. Dans *Béatrice et le forestier*, une pie aux ailes déployées comme l'Esprit-Saint dans une Annonciation surgit dans l'angle supérieur gauche pour se joindre à la profusion d'oiseaux, de fleurs, de feuillages et de chats encadrant les deux personnages principaux. Sur la gauche, Béatrice, sorte de Vierge sexy vêtue d'un pantalon violet, porte un panier plein de bûches. Le garde-forestier sur la droite, bel ange de l'Annonciation aux yeux verts et à la chemise également verte, tient dans sa main droite une faucille au long manche ; de sa ceinture pend une scie électrique. Ils sont tous les deux pris dans un enchevêtrement de fleurs jaunes, de feuillages rouges et oranges et de branches anguleuses et sombres. À leurs pieds se tient une petite troupe de chats noir et blanc tandis que des mésanges jaune vif à tête noire sont perchées dans l'arbre sur la droite. Mais, malgré l'éclat des couleurs et la plénitude de la composition, tout n'est pas parfait dans cet hortus conclusus contemporain. L'oiseau annonciateur est une pie, associée habituellement aux mauvaises nouvelles, le garde-forestier tient une faucille, attribut du Temps qui symbolise la mort inévitable, ainsi qu'une scie, outil de la destruction de la nature dans l'idéologie écologique contemporaine. Quant à la figure virginale, elle exhibe sous sa poitrine généreuse les fruits de la destruction : des bûches fraîchement coupées. Et au cœur même de l'œuvre, un chat noir et blanc regarde avidement trois petits merles. La composition est loin de reproduire l'harmonie et la sérénité de la tapisserie médiévale à laquelle on pense immédiatement. Il s'agit ici d'une composition agressive, traversée d'assonances excentriques, à la facture énergique.

Le chat joue un rôle de premier plan dans deux autres toiles remarquables. Dans *Ezraël chasse le papillon* (81 x 65 cm), Ezraël, le corps longiligne et ondoyant, est dressé sur ses pattes arrière dans un champ de verges d'or, chassant avec enthousiasme un papillon insaisissable. Dans l'autre, *Ezraël voit le chardonneret* (100 x 50 cm), ce même chat, qui n'a jamais été lâché dans la nature auparavant, découvre un chardonneret perché sur un tournesol géant. La présence du chat, plus charmante que menaçante, suggère toutefois le désaccord sous-jacent à l'apparente perfection de l'ordre naturel.

Dans une autre série, Zuka évoque le dynamisme des oiseaux : leur envol, leurs tournolements, plutôt que leur existence paisible et statique au sein d'une tapisserie florale. C'est particulièrement vrai pour les oiseaux marins. Dans *Vol de pélicans et de mouettes* (89 x 116 cm), grand paysage californien, les deux espèces sont montrées tournoyant au-dessus d'un banc de poissons. Les pélicans grotesques et lourds lancent leur proie dans les airs et les mouettes, plus légères et rapides, en profitent pour l'attraper dans leur bec. Les plumes maron des pélicans, à la texture épaisse et riche, contrastent avec celles, blanches, légèrement esquissées, des mouettes, mises en valeur par l'arrière-plan vert foncé de l'eau. Dans une autre composition californienne, *Les mouettes arrivent* (100 x 100 cm), un sujet que Zuka a utilisé dans une superbe peinture murale pour l'Alliance Française de New York, la vigueur des coups de pinceau et la perspective plongeante insufflent un dynamisme troublant aux tournolements, aux piqués et à la célérité des mouettes, rendant leur vol palpable.

Alors que Zuka représente souvent des rassemblements d'oiseaux, en compagnie de leurs congénères ou d'autres espèces – je pense en particulier à cet autre paysage de Californie, *Le Matin à Hermosa* (100 x 100 cm), avec au premier plan ses bandes séduisantes de bécasseaux et, tout au fond, des mouettes sur les ondulations de sable rose et d'eau bleue – elle peint parfois de véritables portraits. Ainsi ces

trois petites têtes de flamant rose orangé au bec noir sont des gros plans de cette espèce photogénique d'un grand raffinement décoratif. Pour réaliser le portrait en pied d'un flamant, Zuka étire le support en un format vertical afin d'y loger les longues pattes du sujet. Ce qui est frappant dans les toiles de Zuka, ce n'est pas seulement leur exubérance décorative et haute en couleur, même si les toiles en regorgent, mais plutôt la grande variété de ses angles d'approche pour représenter les oiseaux, leur vie, leurs comportements ou la nature en général ; la diversité des langages picturaux déployés, des atmosphères évoquées et surtout de l'échelle et du format des tableaux, qui vont de la miniature pour certains portraits d'oiseaux au grand format ambitieux, de l'horizontalité étirée jusqu'à l'exagération à une verticalité maîtrisée, en accord avec les variables de la composition. En insistant sur la valeur visuelle et sentimentale du pigeon méprisé mais omniprésent dans *Midi : boulevard Pasteur* (65 x 81 cm), ou sur l'esthétique séduisante du moineau ordinaire dans l'inventif *Moineaux* dans l'althea (100 x 50 cm), ou encore sur la beauté poignante du corbeau maléfique dans le grand format *Deux corbeaux dans la glycine* (100 x 100 cm), épure extrême-orientale où les sombres corbeaux se détachent sur le fond mauve rosé de l'arrière-plan, Zuka prend une position politique aussi bien qu'esthétique. Par le biais de la peinture, elle plaide en faveur des marginaux familiers et émouvants du monde naturel et nous enjoint de prêter attention aux humains qui subissent le même sort.

Linda Nochlin

Traduit par Isabelle Vassart

Paula Harper
ART IN AMERICA, 2007

Zuka at Darthea Speyer (birds)

Zuka continues to follow her own path, an unconventional one relative to contemporary trends. In two previous shows at Darthea Speyer, she explored the pictorial possibilities of cows. Her new paintings (all 2006; most oil on canvas and around 40 inches square) display the same intense colors and lively brushwork, but the striking compositions spring from observations of a different subject: birds. Unlike cows, birds are not heavy or earthbound; they're small, quick and airborne. Some images feature tiny birds flickering amid dense flowering foliage, as in a Persian tapestry. In others, seagulls sail above spare, extended planes of sea and sand. Expressively abstracted, Zuka's birds zoom in from the top and sides of the canvas or hop up from the bottom, flattening pictorial structures into all-over patterns and activating the images from edge to edge.

When in Burgundy, Zuka studies the common country birds that live in her garden there, such as crows, sparrows, jays and chickadees. In Paris, she concentrates on the most ordinary city birds: the blue-gray pigeons that congregate sociably on the cobblestones of her Montparnasse neighborhood. Since she often visits Los Angeles, where she was born, the exhibition included paintings and watercolors of the flocks of seagulls, terns and sandpipers that share Hermosa Beach with humans.

All Zuka's birds are busy with daily routines of feeding and flying, sometimes competing rapaciously for food and space in their overlapping territories. She depicts their forms and movements with accuracy and empathy, sensitive to the life of each individual as well as the dynamic of the group. Occasionally, her knack for witty caricature infuses an individual bird with what our species labels "personality." In two large paintings of her country garden, she includes figures of humans who tend the land—a local gardener and a forester. They merge into their painted paradise in happy symbioses with the flora and other fauna.

Zuka's images evoke the gaiety and innocence of folk art. In this, they recall Paula Modersohn-Becker's deliberately rustic treatment of simple country scenes, a style that declares its difference from cosmopolitan sophistication. Zuka's own approach is also compatible with her subject matter: she chooses not the exotic or flamboyant, but the most humble birds, numerous to the point of peskiness, that share our environment. Her paintings convey the delight she takes in discovering the little lives of creatures that inhabit a world right before our eyes but often go unnoticed.

Danièle Miguet

Conservateur en chef du Patrimoine
MUSÉE DE CHARLIEU, JUILLET 2008

Zuka ou la tradition naturaliste revisitée

L'oeil aux aguets, ces deux-là s'apprêtent à piquer du bec dans une tomate tandis que d'autres, plus loin, ont déjà attaqué les appétissantes fraises ; ces deux petites mésanges dont les couleurs complètent le chromatisme du cerisier font preuve d'un féroce appétit, l'armée des étourneaux envahit la toile en rangs serrés, le faucon pèlerin étend ses ailes d'un air menaçant... Zuka fait magnifiquement ressortir le caractère propre de chaque espèce et peint de véritables portraits à la fois physiques et psychologiques de tout ce peuple volatile.

A bien regarder ses toiles, on note que si les oiseaux choisis, sont souvent peints avec malice, parfois avec complicité, cela ne contrevient nullement à la justesse de l'observation.

C'est aussi pour l'artiste une façon de nous faire vivre des histoires dans lesquelles chaque oiseau est un personnage à qui, comme dans la nature, il arrive toutes sortes d'aventures d'une grande intensité puisque il y va de sa survie.

Peut-être est-ce aussi pour cela que Zuka porte une attention particulière aux oiseaux mal aimés des villes et des campagnes : corbeaux, pigeons, mouettes, étourneaux..., ceux qui ont marqué notre imaginaire, des contes de fées maléfiques aux oiseaux d'Hitchcock et sur

lesquels pèse toujours la menace humaine. En les considérant avec tendresse et humour, elle nous conduit subtilement à porter sur eux un autre regard.

Les visiteurs sont invités à entrer dans l'univers très expressif de cette coloriste de grand talent. Ses toiles aux couleurs éclatantes, aux entrelacs exubérants remplis d'oiseaux, de feuillages et de fleurs unis dans une harmonie décorative jubilatoire exaltent une intense joie de vivre ; de l'espièglerie, de l'amour, et le don de nous faire partager son émerveillement quotidien au contact de la nature.

Lydia Harambourg

LA GAZETTE DE L'HÔTEL DROUOT, 15 AVRIL 2005

Zuka la couleur en liberté

Une peinture de Zuka respire la joie édenique. L'artiste américaine travaille par thème et pour sa septième exposition à la galerie Darthea Speyer, elle offre un florilège de volatiles dont la diversité des espèces enchante ses dons de coloriste. La galerie s'est transformée en une volière. Ses murs, loin d'épingler, comme des papillons, les oiseaux, leur confèrent un espace devenu mouvant. Un bruissement d'ailes l'anime, alors qu'un flot coloré nous submerge. Zuka est une artiste généreuse. Elle nous fait partager son émerveillement. Éblouie par l'étonnante palette offerte par les plumes, elle transmet à ses peintures la saveur visuelle et tactile, magnifiquement rendue par une matière sensuelle et lumineuse. Voici des pies, des huppés, des chardonnerets, des fauvettes capucine, des geais, des faucons pèlerins, des loriots, des rouges-gorges, tous familiers de la campagne bourguignonne où elle travaille. Mais aussi les oiseaux de mer observés sur les rivages de sa Californie natale. Tout commence par des croquis. Le trait décrit, attentif à saisir les particularités de l'oiseau, avant d'être repris à l'atelier par un pinceau alerte et sûr. Assurance de la main au service de la justesse du regard. L'artiste connaît bien le travail d'Audubon, célèbre dessinateur naturaliste du XIX^e siècle qu'elle admire. Elle délaisse son caractère encyclopédique, pour n'en garder que l'expression artistique ajustée à l'exacte configuration qui nous fait identifier ces oiseaux. Mis en scène, voici le ballet des fauvettes dans la vigne vierge, les merles piqués dans les iris comme dans une tapisserie millefleurs, les étourneaux qui ont pris possession des buissons jaunes alors qu'un merle noir, au sol, devise avec des mésanges jaunes sur les bouddleias mauves. Zuka est ainsi. Elle transcrit ce qu'elle voit, mais son sens créatif lui fait élire des situations inattendues. La fréquentation assidue, l'observation patiente et amoureuse de la nature lui font voir ce qui peut passer inaperçu. Elle opte souvent pour une verticalité et une perspective étagée, comme le montrent les miniatures persanes, que sa peinture évoque parfois avec ses tons en aplats, fortement contrastés et sonores. De petites toiles complètent l'ensemble. Ce sont des portraits d'oiseaux, mis dans la cage de la peinture.

Sarah Perves

Sarah Perves is an art history lecturer at Ecole Polytechnique and H.E.C

Nobody paints birds nowadays!

For some time now blackbirds, chickadees, goldfinches and seagulls have landed on Zuka's paintings, creating unexpected articulated forms and revealing Zuka's gift for caricature once again. The vision is intimate or even aerial but it is always "sauvage". The brushwork is sometimes broad and rough, at other times delicate and fine, for instance the tiny goldfinches with their stripey rounded stomachs caught in the lacey web of cosmos flowers. The spectator is drawn into the paintings through their rhythm - see the close up of a robin red breast perched in the furry buds of an ash tree in springtime which reminds us of the strokes of an orchestra conductor's baton. The gestures are always precise, even when they are ample and free.

Sarah Perves: Nobody paints birds nowadays!

Zuka: Newspapers have currently been showing great interest in the subject: recent scientific studies on cognitive behavior reveal that birds' brains are much more flexible than was once thought. It is now established that parrots are capable of inventing syntax and pigeons can memorize. The latest research on the DNA of chickadees shows they have their own extrovert and introvert personalities within their own type.

S.P. Have you always done drawings of birds?

Z. In my childhood I was always looking out of the window of my house in Hollywood; I am an only child... Then at the ocean I observed the seagulls and the sandpipers. My country house in Burgundy is surrounded by trees. The slightest flit in the corner of my eye and I know it's a bird and I start looking. I have been drawing them for years with unwaning enthusiasm, I admit! And I am fascinated by their habits.

S.P. Have you ever painted them before?

Z. In California I did a big painting of a roadrunner and behind, a group of little Indians. Ironically the title is "When the Red Man Came", instead of "When the White Man Came".

S.P. But there is a great tradition of ornithological painting in America.

Z. I am very interested in John James Audubon, a 19th century french naturalist painter who lived and painted in the United States. I have just read his biography written by a French author, Yvon Chatelin. I was surprised to learn of the large number of birds that Audubon killed in order to paint them. It didn't occur to anybody at the time to say "don't do it"; the idea of extinction hardly existed. One mustn't forget that at the time American pioneer farmers were trying to eke out a living and flocks of seed eating birds were a real menace.

S.P. This takes nothing away from Audubon's gift as an artist.

Z. He had an extraordinary talent for painting their attitudes. They were stylizations of what birds do, so he was much criticized for his lack of naturalist precision. He had so many rivals since there were bird painters in every American city.

S.P. What is your approach?

Z. It is different because it involves my desire to express something that is birdlike and not manlike. In a way I am always telling stories. I have a sketchbook constantly on the go in which I note down everything I see and everything I intend to do.

S.P. How do your paintings get under way? (What is your painting process?)

Z. I sketch trees, bushes, flowers in my garden and in the countryside throughout all seasons. When I started to draw birds I already had the poplar tree, the cherry tree, the virginia Creeper in my hand. I could place the birds where I saw them. One day while walking I saw some wild flowers covered with butterflies. The wings were closed and looked like leaves with veins. Then another one of the same species opened its wings and there underneath was a bright orange triangle and little black dots. I thought: when I get home I'm going to put them on canvas. Then I added a hawk as a counterweight for something which might have appeared a bit mawkish.

The notion of density is important in Zuka's work for coming to terms with the weightlessness of birds. Although she has opted for bright colours, Zuka has remained faithful to the precise colours which characterize each bird type. But why not seagulls with cobalt blue wings? Each yellow, each green, each black, each red expresses a single urgent note. The sensual and generous pigment creates an intensely irresistible light of its own. Hence a single chickadee pecking away voraciously at the yellow cadmium of a giant sunflower under a turquoise sky. Without forgetting the birds of Picasso and Braque in the 20th century, and those of Monet, Morisot and Cassatt in the 19th century, Zuka's work, going beyond the naturalists, creates a new language of form and colour within a great pictorial tradition.

Sarah Perves

Daniel Percheron
CATALOGUE, 2001

Danse avec les vaches

Zuka persiste et signe. Oui, c'est clair, elle en tient pour les vaches. En disant "c'est clair", je songe dans la foulée à la blancheur des Charolaises qui lui tirent l'œil en toute saison, dans son Morvan. Mais ce blanc primitif, c'est clair aussi, vole en éclats sous le pinceau de Zuka. " Quand tu commences à voir couleur, me dit-elle, alors tu vois couleur ! "

Fut un temps où l'effet troupeau logeait encore dans la couleur. Fut un temps où les vaches donnaient de concert dans le rose, ou dans le mauve, ou dans le bleu. Mais depuis des années, chacune d'elles, sur la toile, s'en vient crânement se distinguer de ses voisines. Chacune d'elles s'en vient jouer sa couleur, clamer sa différence, brouter son singulier. Qu'elles se posent en trio sur la toile, le trio sera tricolore, une bleue, une rose, une verte. L'affaire est entendue, le lyrisme sera bariolé ou ne sera pas. Et les vaches ont beau cultiver une archaïque lourdeur, les voilà qui dansent une valse à trois tons.

Avec une science exquise, Zuka conjugue la vache comme un verbe fondamental. Un verbe ruminateur, sauvage et familier.

Elle le conjugue à tous les temps de sa fantaisie, multiple, inlassable. Oui, voilà bien une science exquise que de conjointre sur le rectangle de la toile la basse continue et le rêve aérien. La basse continue fait meuh-meuh, toujours encore, depuis la nuit des temps. Le pinceau rêveur, lui, tricote une libre variation, joueuse et frondeuse.

Si la masse des ruminants s'arrime à leur panse, cette masse pansive, grâce à Zuka, a le don de se faire expansive. Regardez-les flotter, ces belles bouées colorées, voyez-les décoller dans le printemps de l'espace...

Paula Harper
ART IN AMERICA, February 1994

Zuka at La Maison Française, NYU (cows)

It's tempting to call Zuka an "outsider artist." Her paintings are quirky, original, maverick. But she is not self-taught or nonprofessional. On the contrary, she is formally sophisticated and has exhibited widely in the United States (where she was born of Russian parents) and in Europe, especially Paris, her home of many years. She has excelled at the most ambitious genre of art, history painting, and in 1989 toured an exhibition of her ebullient revisions of the events and personalities of the French Revolution. But she is certainly outside contemporary mainstream trends. Her work connects to the oldest, deepest current in the history of painting—the tradition of placing highly developed pictorial skills entirely at the service of a subject matter—an egoless immersion in the "it." The homely subject of her present series -cows - makes her virtuosity as a pure painter particularly visible.

The Charolais cattle that graze in the fields of Burgundy are white, so the vivid colors Zuka gives them begin with her perceptions of how their bodies reflect the changing light, perceptions then magnified and condensed by her painter's imagination. The light slanting across her meadows is made of thick and creamy paint, in intense and saturated colors. The cattle that materialize from the succulent pigment are the result of keen observation and incisive drawing. Zuka sees them with the intelligence of humor, as members of a herd and as individual creatures who react to her observing them. They look mildly annoyed or puzzled or curious, they surge forward to sense the intruder. Their tails switch, their heads lower. Then, satisfied or bored or both, the cows go about their own business, placid and self-contained.

Simultaneously, they form lively patterns on flattened surfaces-brushy, energetic patches of color and generous strokes of paint made by the whole, athletic arm of the artist. The pictures move back and forth across the border between color abstraction and painterly figuration, each mode giving its own kind of pleasure.

Cows can be a touchy subject for some feminists. In the past, they have served as symbols of women's submissive enchainment to nature's round of breeding and nurturing, in contrast to the higher male world of culture. Zuka blithely makes these notions of masculine transcendence and feminine immanence seem outdated and irrelevant. Her cows have no interest in being symbols in our system. Sensual, solid and powerfully present, they are available to physical empathy and intuition but not to ratiocination. Subversively, they remain outside our frameworks of dominance and submission, ambition and guilt. Cow culture will probably continue to be excluded from multiculturalist constructions.

If the real vanguard still continues to exist on the fluctuating margins of the art world, then Zuka's paintings are worth considering for what is now "marginal" in them: their willed simplicity, their humor, their absence of anger and ego. The artist's attitude is one of humility and awareness in the face of a separate reality. The paintings offer an experience described by Zuka's Russian countryman, Nabokov, as esthetic bliss - "the sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm."

Paula Harper

ART IN AMERICA, October 2001

Zuka at Darthea Speyer (cows)

Most of the news about cows these days is bad, but Zuka's visions of them provide a happy alternative. Zuka has been painting cows for about 10 years; firsthand observations of the white Charolais cattle around her summer home in Burgundy have been steadily transformed by her gift for fantasy, caricature and the folkloric. In her recent works the brushwork is broader and more expressionist, and the cows more intensely colorful-orange with green horns, for example, or magenta with yellow. They dwell in larger landscapes, likely to be red meadows patterned in tiers of blue, turquoise, violet and lime green. In purely formal terms, these paintings are sophisticated arrangements of color and shape in the tradition of the Fauves, particularly Vlaminck with his wild facture. They also owe a debt to the artist's Russian forebears, bold Goncharova and dreamy Chagall.

Zuka's subject recalls medieval calendar pictures, which typically include farm animals in the familiar round of seasonal activities. The subtext promises that everything takes its proper place in nature's grand cycle, and all is right with the world. Incredibly, this stable, rural world still) exists two hours south of Paris in the village of St. Brancher, where small farms lie on the hillsides, and cows drowse and forage. Zuka refashions the timeless subject into a contemporary painter's dream of color and movement suffused with a satirist's wit. Some of her compositions wryly refer to the religious significance underlying medieval domestic landscapes: in *Sunset at St. Brancher*, golden clouds of glory over the herd suggest a Transfiguration or Assumption; in *Angelus*, the cows seem mildly attentive to a bell in the church tower; in the crèche-like *Dinner Hour*, multicolored cows crowd around an iconic hay bale in a shed. These images suggest the pretensions of humans, of course, who have granted cows a role in our drama. Cows are hardly pious, and they have their own rituals.

Nevertheless, in *The Hale-Bopp Comet*, Zuka finds a connection between heaven and earth, between cosmic phenomena and lowly cow life that seems perfectly just. The sky is an energetically brushed jubilation of blobby stars, comet showers and Hale-Bopp itself. Below, the earthy, companionable animals lie, some sleeping, others alert. Neither alarmed nor amazed, they peaceably coexist with other forms of nature, like cows in Paradise.

George Sugarman

NEW YORK CITY, AUGUST 1, 1982

Zuka at Darthea Speyer (amerindians collages)

The figure seems huge. Its arms raised and spread apart, its legs open and slightly bent in movement, it is the center of frantic activity. From its shoulders a fragmented cape swirls to both sides, centered by a strikingly red headdress. Between its legs and on all sides, tiny figures, their arms raised also, repeat the disjointed movement of the cape as they dance and move. The sense of activity is heightened by spirals that swirl on and around the center figure between whose arms other irregular spirals hang suspended.

The eye adjusts and notices how this central figure, the center of activity, is also the center of stability. Although it is scissor-drawn so well and its movement so strong that it seems to be modeled, it is actually a flat, brown profile which firmly anchors the moving loincloth around its waist, the jewelry and spirals covering its body. The outline of the arm and leg on the right makes a triangle which holds the right side of the cape, also essentially triangular, as it flies from the edge of the canvas toward the headdress. Geometric, if irregular configuration between the parts of the body and the edge of the canvas stabilize the activity in those areas. Yet nothing is locked in, no movement is frustrated. Everything leads up to the head and its headdress and thence to the outstretched arms, and back to the swirling cape. One notices details and realizes that all this is done with patterned paper, commercial designs, that seem remarkably to fit just right. And

then one sees they are not all "just right". What about the background ? A light paper patterned with small pink and green forms – was it chosen only because its rigid regularity contrasts with the activity of the foreground? Yes – but one feels there is more to it. One looks to the title and finds out what that "more" is. "The Rainmaker" gives us the myth and the myth gives us the words to enlarge the visual experience. And we understand the mastery in the choice of pattern for the ground; the dry, dull expanse is the rainless sky. But wait. How sly it is. The tiny regular dots have also a feeling of a patterned rain. And again a twist: where the sky meets the earth (in an angular line) the same pattern is used, but in tan and brown colors. This is now the parched earth, the sparse vegetation.

Yet here is larger paradox. This is a serious subject, treated seriously. We have all experienced drought : it is a contemporary problem too. We can feel the anxiety in the picture. There is nothing ambiguous about it, And yet it is an attractive, an appealing picture, with lovely color, strong and beautifully controlled rhythms and delightful details. Can an image so pleasurable to look at and so sturdily composed also express tension and anxiety?

Zuka shows that it can, and, in the other pictures, that other pleasurable images can express other serious emotions and incidents. And it is in this that Zuka shows her real mastery. She has doubled the double entendre. She takes the material of an ordinary, every-day, commercial product, made for decorative purposes, and turns it into what? A decorative picture? If you will. But what decoration, where every inch reveals a pun on the original material and the myth, where the myth is enlarged by wit and inventiveness to contemporary significance, where the collage technique of outside-inside meaning is expanded to take in subjects of serious emotional content. For this is the real significance of these pictures. Aside from the extraordinary visual delight there is this journey of the mind as we realize that we have started from decorative paper, then gone to visual puns and returned at last to decoration so transformed that it illuminates and enlarges at every turn a serious subject matter.

These pictures are rare examples of the aim of all visual art; to so unite material and technique to each other and to subject matter that all three are distinct and yet cannot be separated, so that the unison creates a meaning which transcends all three.

Zuka à la galerie Darthea Speyer (collages amérindiens)

Le personnage paraît immense. Les bras dressés, écartés, les jambes entrouvertes et légèrement fléchies par le mouvement sont le centre d'une activité intense. Dominée par une étonnante coiffe rouge, une cape lascérée part des épaules et se déploie de chaque côté du corps. Au bas de la toile, de petites silhouettes aux bras également dressés, poursuivent dans leurs danses et leurs gestes, les mouvements saccadés de la cape. Le sens de l'action est intensifié par les spirales qui tournoient autour du personnage principal et par d'autres spirales, irrégulières, qui pendent immobiles entre ses bras.

L'œil réalise peu à peu que cette figure n'est pas seulement le centre d'activité du tableau, mais aussi son point de stabilité. Bien qu'elle ait été découpée aux ciseaux et que son mouvement soit si puissant qu'il paraisse avoir été sculpté, c'est en réalité une silhouette plate et brune. Le personnage ceint étroitement un pagne autour de ses reins; des bijoux et des spirales recouvrent son corps. Les profils de la jambe et du bras droits forment un triangle avec un des côtés de la cape : triangle déterminant qui semble voler du bord de la toile jusqu'à la coiffe. Configuration géométrique, bien qu'irrégulière, située entre le corps et le cadre et qui stabilise l'action. Mais rien n'est figé, aucun mouvement n'est entravé. Tout se dirige vers la tête et sa parure, vers les bras tendus, puis revient vers la cape ondoiyante.

Lorsque nous observons chaque détail, nous découvrons que l'oeuvre est composée de papiers peints, de motifs trouvés dans le commerce, qui semblent s'adapter « avec justesse ».

Puis, nous réalisons que cette « justesse » n'est pas si évidente. Prenons par exemple, le fond de la toile : un papier de couleur claire, recouvert de petits motifs roses et verts. A-t-il été choisi uniquement pour que sa répétition mécanique contraste avec l'activité du premier plan? Oui – mais nous pressentons qu'il y a quelque chose « en plus ». Nous regardons alors le titre et comprenons ce « plus ». « Le Faiseur de pluie » suggère le mythe et le mythe nous donne la clé pour approfondir notre expérience visuelle. Nous percevons ainsi la maîtrise de l'artiste dans son choix des motifs du fond : l'étendue sèche et terne d'un ciel sans pluie. Mais attention, et c'est là que se cache la ruse : les petites taches régulières donnent aussi une impression de pluie. Et, nouvelle astuce, pour tracer la ligne brisée de l'horizon où le ciel rejoint la terre, le même motif a été utilisé, mais dans des tons bruns et ocres. Il devient alors la terre desséchée, la végétation clairsemée.

Nous sommes confrontés à un paradoxe plus important. Un sujet grave, traité avec sérieux. Nous aussi avons nos propres périodes de sécheresse; c'est un problème de notre temps. Nous pouvons, face à ce tableau, ressentir de l'angoisse. C'est évident. Bien qu'il soit par ailleurs séduisant et attirant, avec de belles couleurs, des rythmes forts magnifiquement dominés et des détails subtils. Une toile si agréable, si rigoureusement composée, est-elle capable d'exprimer la tension et l'inquiétude?

Par son oeuvre, Zuka nous prouve que c'est possible et que des images attrayantes peuvent transmettre des émotions et des événements graves. Et c'est sa habileté. Elle donne un double sens aux choses. Elle prend un matériel ordinaire, quotidien, tel qu'un produit du commerce créé dans un but décoratif et le transforme. Pour obtenir quoi ? Une toile décorative ? Si vous voulez. Mais une décoration où chaque centimètre serait un jeu allusif entre la matière originale et le mythe, où le mythe serait actualisé avec esprit et invention, où la technique du collage pourrait traduire cette dualité « intérieur – extérieur » et traiter des sujets émouvants et profonds. Nous comprenons ici la signification réelle de ces toiles. Elles donnent à notre oeil un très grand plaisir et, parallèlement, obligent notre esprit à passer des papiers décoratifs aux jeux visuels pour retourner enfin à la décoration. Mais une décoration si transformée que chaque détail éclaire et développe un thème important.

Ces tableaux démontrent étonnamment le but de tout art plastique : que la technique et la matière se confondent avec le sujet, tout en restant distinctes et inséparables, afin que, de leur cohésion, découle une signification qui les transcende.

George Sugarman

Traduction : Florence Poncet

Ruth Weisberg,
ARTWEEK, 1981

Zuka at the Jacqueline Anhalt Gallery

Indians in the 18th century California is the title of Zuka's exhibition of collages at the Jacqueline Anhalt Gallery. The peculiar marriage of history painting and decorative collage techniques utilizing wallpaper and marbelized paper is partially explained by Zuka's status as a Franco-Californian. She grew up in a colony of Russian emigres in Hollywood, but has spent the last thirty odd -years in Paris. The tension between French decorative art and the subjugation of the Indian could tear this work apart, but Zuka's approach is both lyric and ironic rather than either elegiac or angry. It is clear that she empathizes and identifies with the indians Her recurring childhood fantasy, on long rambles in the Hollywood Hills, was to be an indian. It is just as Albert Camus said".....that a man's work is nothing but the long journey through life to recover, through the detours of art, the two or three great and simple images that first gained access to his heart. These works focus on the impact of the Indian on California fauna. There is a squirrel's eye-view of the Indian in "The Hunters". In the "Coyotes" the overall shapes of the animals, created from patterned and textured collage, are particularly well drawn. The scissors can be an eloquent drawing tool. There is a keen sense of the coyote's movement and character, seen among the skeletal plant forms of the high desert. A concern for structure in both plants and animals greatly increases the profundity of a decorative art form.

Michael Gibson,
ARTNEWS, DECEMBER, 1982

Zuka at Darthea Speyer

Zuka is a California-born artist who has been living in France for the past 30 years. Her latest show at Darthea Speyer's gallery presented recent works done in an original medium that is admirably suited to her inventive powers. Zuka's medium is wallpaper, which she cuts out to make mostly large, animated, and extremely colorful pictures devoted to representations of the daily or ceremonial life of California Indians. She has become an authentic virtuoso at working with scissors and the infinite variety of sometimes implausible patterns found in wallpaper. The delightful aspect of her work is that she gives life to the inanimate and fantasy to the repetitive and the dull. The spirit of the work is original and playful, and the brashness of the invention of forms and juxtapositions can almost go unnoticed because of the rightness of the solutions-just as a successful piece of acrobatics will always seem easy to the unknowing spectator.

Pierre Schneider
L'EXPRESS 1988

Zuka : que la fête commence

Seules les femmes devraient avoir le droit de faire la guerre et la révolution. Ou, à défaut, de les raconter. Zuka, qui est américaine, aurait été capable de réconcilier Robespierre et Louis XVI. En vérité, c'est le miracle (laïque) qu'accomplit sa peinture : les quelque 80 tableaux, collages et reliefs colorés qu'elle présente, jusqu'au 30 avril, à la fondation Mona Bismarck transforment les faits en fête joyeuse. Non pas que les drames soient censurés dans son oeuvre : Marat assassiné, Marie-Antoinette décapitée. Mais de la guillotine ne coule, en peinture, qu'un vermillon jubilant. Zuka joue avec une feinte candeur - autrement dit, avec une habileté consommée - de ce décalage entre le poids de l'Histoire et la légèreté de son pinceau. Car elle est tout sauf naïve. Son art se nourrit tout autant de Bonnard que des enseignes d'autrefois c'est Epinal revu et corrigé par la modernité.

Aussi, prudence ! Restituée par Zuka, la Révolution devient une fête. Mais sous le charme se terre l'ironie. Ses joyeuses et gracieuses images prennent à revers toute une imagerie solennelle et creuse, comme les statues des grands hommes. Rien de plus dangereux que les moments d'Histoire érigés en mythes : à mesure qu'elle les célèbre, Zuka les désarme.

Hank Burchard
THE WASHINGTON POST, JULY 22, 1988

Liberated Art, *Non Fraternité*

REVOLUTION has swept the walls of the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The French Revolution of 1789 that is, as depicted in 85 recent paintings and constructions by Zuka. The artist, an American, long resident in Paris, has used disciplined wit and irresistible energy to evoke the tumultuous beginnings of Gallic democracy. The exhibit is sponsored by the FrenchAmerican Foundation in celebration of the bicentennial of the birth of *liberté, fraternité* and *égalité*. It is billed as a feminist reinterpretation of the Revolution, which does disservice to Zuka because this is not women's art, it is art by a woman. "Most history has been seen through men's eyes," she says, "so my perspective may seem unusual."

Not so. Her perspective is so self-evidently reasonable and penetrating that it makes other viewpoints seem skewed. Having seen Zuka's "Charlotte Corday Assassinates Marat," one may never again look at Jacques-Louis David's famous "Death of Marat" without feeling that something's missing.

What is not missing from Zuka's version is a sense of the real tragedy of the assassination. David's painting is superb hagiography, Zuka's is powerful historiography. It captures the moment when the fire-eating editor has breathed his last and Corday, a poor but comely and well brought-up young provincial, has just begun to realize what she has done.

The painting also works as allegory. Corday was no less idealistic and patriotic than the revolutionary Marat, and she symbolizes the ancien régime, striking out fearfully at this monstrous new thing, freedom, whose spores have come from the New World, clinging to the uniforms of the French soldiers and sailors who fought alongside the American revolutionaries.

David's Marat is a pallid, noble martyr; Zuka has given us an ugly, scrawny, scrofulous corpse consistent with history (Marat was soaking in his tub to relieve an agonizing and disfiguring skin disease). Never shy in her choice of colors, Zuka has made Marat gray-green with blue undertones.

Color is central to her style, but seldom such vivid strokes and shades as she has used here. "When you deal with the French Revolution you can drown in red, white and blue," she said. "Rosettes, sashes and cockades were everywhere. It was necessary for my other colors to be strong, to keep them from being submerged."

Rather than submerged they are buoyant, and the paintings are so well mounted that the collective effect is of sharing the streets with these people who are learning to be brave and free. The works are all of a piece, so that in the most lighthearted scenes there are mad faces that foreshadow the horrors to come, and in the midst of the Reign of Terror there are flashes of drollery and delight. Dozens of portraits make real and readable the faces of Robespierre and Danton, Madame Roland and Olympe de Gouges, King Louis XVI and the Marquis de La Fayette. For those of us who have grown a little vague about French history, there are excellent historical sketches.

Here and there, hardly in undue proportion, there are women. Women pamphleteers, women speakers, women in the streets, women of the streets. And here is one of the most astonishing of all the vivid scenes of the Revolution: 3 000 women of starving Paris, marching on Versailles to demand bread. Whether Marie Antoinette actually said "Let them eat cake" is doubtful; what is indisputable is that these fiercely determined women forced the king and queen to come back to Paris and attend to business. Thus the principle was established for all the world to see that the will of the people was paramount.

There is a story in most of the paintings – "The point is always to express something," Zuka says – and a story behind many of them. Her powerful and subtle rendering of Marie Antoinette approaching the guillotine in a farm cart grew out of a sketch by David. "It painted itself," she said. "Most paintings develop, but I knew before I started this one just how it would be." The blade of the guillotine forms the apex, from which a Jacob's ladder of blue-clad soldiers snakes down the canvas to the white-clad queen, sitting in a farm cart with her hands bound behind her. Featureless, she seems a ghost already, yet every inch a queen.

If the NMWA can consistently mount such exhibitions as this, there will be an end to the carping over whether a museum dedicated to the promotion of art by women can ever be first-rate.

Pierre Brisset
L'OEIL, AVRIL 1988

Qu'elle est joyeuse notre Révolution !

Ah ! Qu'elle est donc jolie, fraîche et joyeuse notre Révolution vue, revue et corrigée par le pinceau aux couleurs tendres, pimpantes, fringantes ou claironnantes de Zuka, petite fille d'un général russe, native de Los Angeles, vivant et travaillant à Paris aux côtés d'un mari français, redoutable dessinateur politique... Une Américaine férue et passionnée d'histoire qui après avoir pris pour thèmes l'indépendance des États-Unis à l'occasion de son Bicentenaire, puis les Indiens de Californie à l'époque des conquistadors, s'est plongée dans l'étude - très sérieuse - de la Révolution française pour nous raconter aujourd'hui, sur la toile ou sur un épais carton découpé en suivant fidèlement les contours de la scène représentée, les grandes heures de cette révolution.

Depuis le 14 juillet 1789 où nous voyons prise la Bastille dans une grande fête populaire, sans cadavres ni têtes au bout des piques, jusqu'à l'arrivée cinq ans plus tard au pied de l'échafaud d'un Robespierre blessé et somnolent soutenu par son ami Saint-Just crânement résigné, rien ne nous est caché des heurs de malheurs de cette révolution qui allait ébranler tout le monde. Ni les fêtes, celle de l'Être suprême au Champ de Mars, celle de ces dames de la Halle allant chercher à Versailles «le boulanger, la boulangère et le petit mitron» ou de ces autres Dames, celles là du Palais Royal, applaudissant et rigolant au discours enflammé d'un Camille Desmoulin juché sur une table, celle même de la bataille de Valmy où, dans la fumée des canons, cavaliers sabre au clair et piétaille foncent sus aux Prussiens alors que claque notre étendard, que flambent nos trois couleurs... Ni, bien sûr, ses malheurs et ses drames : la fuite à Varennes, Charlotte Corday poignardant Marat, puis devant la guillotine, Marie-Antoinette, la veuve Capet à la Conciergerie et conduite au supplice, les Bleus contre les Blancs, etc. Devant toutes ces images inspirées pour la plupart des peintures, dessins (ô David) ou gravures de l'époque, nous devrions à nouveau vibrer, trembler, nous réjouir ou pleurer comme lorsque nous étions enfants. Nenni ! Il y a tant et tant de couleurs vives, tant de mouvement et tant de bonne humeur, notre bleu-blanc-rouge en cocarde, en drapeau, en oriflamme fait tellement merveille, les uniformes de nos gardes nationaux sont si beaux et nos sans-culottes paraissent si bon enfant que, vue par Zuka, notre Révolution n'avait pour acteurs que de braves gens qui ayant bien toujours la tête sur les deux épaules, aimaient tout simplement danser le ballet de la mort avec beaucoup de panache, d'entrain, de gentillesse. Merci Zuka !

Amy Goldin

ART IN AMERICA, JAN-FEB 1974

Zuka at Betty Parsons (American History)

Zuka's paintings are decorative portrayals of the present-day heroes of American liberals – those nineteenth-century figures whose lives and work are interpreted in terms of blackness, femininity and ecological awareness. Since these are not portraits, but icons, the figures are presented as ritual simplifications, spiritualized dolls who stare at us hypnotically. Often they clutch their printed legendary names, which sometimes hover around their heads, like those of Byzantine saints. Yet we are not permitted to worship – the stiffness, banality and ornamental energy of flat gaudy color and collaged patterned paper forbids it. The double bind of moral seriousness thus claimed and simultaneously denied resolves into irony.

The irony is there, all right, and of a peculiarly up-beat kind, but for me it doesn't explain the fascination of this show. What makes an art exhibit interesting? Artistic quality? But that isn't necessarily involving; work can seem pointless no matter how well it's done. The stimulation of personal feelings? But why should I care about your personal feelings, or you about mine? No. Art is objectively interesting. I think, when it binds public and private matters into undigestible lumps that threaten our pigeonholes. Zuka's show is interesting because of its relationship to a recently shattered pigeonhole: women's art. Almost everything about her work – its stress on ornament, its concern with personality, the deliberate naiveté of color and line – fits perfectly into that bit of condemned housing.

Two years ago its blatant femininity would have marked it as trivial and obliterated it as art. Now the same feminine identification will signal "women's lib" and dues will be paid to its political position. It is still not likely to be seen as art. Decoration – more particularly, pattern – is rarely conceived or understood as an artistic resource.

The point of Zuka's patterns is not that they're there but what she does with them. Until we learn to pay attention to that, women's lib is artistically irrelevant. After all, if the usual artistic clichés continue unchanged, it hardly makes any difference whether the perpetrators are male or female. Equal pay for equal work is not an artistic goal, in relation to art it doesn't mean revolution – at best a changing of the guard at the same old palace.

I'm not suggesting that women are genetically, socially or morally obligated to make art that can be called "decorative." But for some peculiar set of reasons, decoration is presently associated with women, and correspondingly excluded from artistic seriousness. The role of decorative elements in "serious" art, therefore, can be exploited by women to their double advantage: it can work for them politically, and it can expand the range and power of their work.

Zuka's show is drawn from her work of the last year and a half, and it covers the period in which she first began working with collaged areas of industrially produced pattern. It is instructive to see how the integration of pattern in her paintings has affected her color and drawing, and ultimately even the ideas she works with. She has always been a highly decorative painter, as can be seen in *Cheyenne Braves*, one of the best as well as one of the earliest paintings in the show. Here the pattern-bearing elements are used architectonically and are absorbed into the subject matter. Flat, regularly repeated small-scale shapes of feather and costume are clearly decorative. They serve as color accents and create rows of rapid horizontal flicker against the slower repeats of the three standing figures, establishing a basic grid format for the painting as a whole.

To compare the James Brothers with John Muir and John Burroughs on opposite sides of the doorway, however, is to see the formal development accompanying the inclusion of collaged pattern. The painting of the two naturalists is conceptually more ambitious, aiming as it does at the integration of figures and landscape. Yet the James Brothers looks less illustrative and less frivolous. Here, in order to meet the requirements of collaged areas of commercial wallpaper, the artist has been forced to tighten her control of line. Edges don't bump around so much. They function more precisely as contours and less as arabesques. The range of small – and large – figured pattern has also entailed an increased sensitivity to scale. Since painted details are no longer the sole elements of rhythm and decoration, Zuka can forego their cosmetic effect and begin to integrate them.

In the earlier work, surfaces are uniformly flat and dense, except for the treatment of faces and hands. There a broken, painterly surface suggested the vulnerability of flesh in contrast to the inorganic solidity of the objective world. Now that areas of collaged pattern add new variations of density, the surface begins to open up and breathe. The color becomes more exact, less raucous, for it must be adjusted to an alien palette and a more flexible space.

With the series of small heads and *Young Lincoln and His Wife*, a near transformation has occurred. The pervasive textural variety and the wider psychological range make these true portraits instead of cut-out faces. The patterned papers have come to express emotional overtones as well as formal values. With *Susan B. Anthony*, *Virginia Woolfe* and *John Muir II*, spiritual intensity no longer depends on staring eyes. Diffused, it is carried by the thrust of a head, the tension of juxtaposed patterns and the new sobriety of color. The paintings are no less decorative than before: ornament itself has broadened the way.