

## ROHNERT PARK, CALIF.

### Judith Linhares at Sonoma State University

Judith Linhares's art has often been compared with Symbolist painting and with the work of Surrealists like Max Ernst and Frida Kahlo. As one looks over "Dangerous Pleasures," her 20-year retrospective exhibition at the University Art Gallery, these sources come immediately to mind. But although her vision, like theirs, is dreamlike and occasionally dark, she dis-

often in the form of ribbons, surround central images in a number of her paintings and drawings. *Spiders* (1971) and *A Stitch in Time* (1974) deal specifically with "feminine" objects—a lace handkerchief, flowers, eggs, a nest, a swan, feathers. In these early works, Linhares's sense of design is unfailingly sure and elegant.

Her mature style gained momentum after her move to New York in 1980. *Ghostly Lover* (1977), *Red Sea* (1983) and other works of this period are particularly reminiscent of Symbolism as she sets enigmatic subject matter against washes of intense color to produce paintings that read as lyrical poems. Others hark back to Max Ernst's bird and forest paintings. *Annunciation* (1986) features a shimmering green bird whose sharp beak points toward a cave in which a nude female torso is visible, the body having the brown hue and grain of wood. The meaning seems obvious, yet the painting retains a sense of mystery.

Some works of this period appear to be influenced by comic-book or cartoon art, including *Psyche and Amor* (1985), in which a female figure with a huge head and fried-egg eyes holds a burning match over a body lying on the ground. Is it the female mind destroying male love in order to survive? Or is she lighting the way to the future, since in the Cupid-Psyche myth the protagonists are finally reunited, bringing mind and emotions together?

*Jack and Jill* (1991) appears, at least to this viewer, to demonstrate the artist's recurring humor. Here Jack goes tumbling down, while Jill watches intently, her large figure as stable as stone and looking as if not a thing in the world could set her tumbling after. In *Corn* (1992) and *Thinking* (1993), Linhares depicts hands, a new subject for her: two pairs of female hands sort cobs, and a pair of strong brown hands interlock fingers. Both works recall Mexican muralist art in their emphasis on strength in honest labor. But as in all her paintings, the sources do double duty. They serve as connections to art-historical works whose references Linhares absorbs, and as building blocks for her own artistic reality. —Gay Morris



Judith Linhares: *Annunciation*, 1986, oil on canvas, 54 by 72 inches; at Sonoma State University.

plays a wit and optimism all her own.

Linhares was born in southern California and received her art education in the Bay Area. A Latin American influence, with its merging of humor and the macabre, is present from the beginning. A series of drawings created in the early 1970s titled "Love Letters from San Jose" features skeletons in scenes of cozy domesticity. A female, hair in rollers, watches a TV show; a gun-toting hombre courts a gartered, high-heeled young woman. Linhares shares an interest with other feminist artists in using motifs and ways of working traditionally associated with women. Decorative bands,