

## Numbers Game

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Left: Artist Francesca DiMattio, Guild & Greyshkul's Esme Watanabe and Sara VanDerBeek, and artist Adriana Farmiga. (Photo: Ryan McNamara) Right: Mary Ann Duganne Glicksman performs *My Father's Diary* at Greene Naftali. (Photo courtesy Greene Naftali)

**TO A DISCOURSE** often ranging between earnestness and dutifulness, Guy de Cointet's nearly forgotten melodramas from a few decades ago sound new notes, but slip into the didactic key. At their best, they morph to the point of magical realism with a European playfulness and the tinny histrionics of Hollywood. (The late Frenchman lived in Los Angeles for the thrust of his career.) At their worst, they become language lessons the pedagogical insistence of which irritates in the manner of *Sesame Street* for grad students. The three performances staged Wednesday night at Greene Naftali, within an exhibition of Cointet's drawings, went from worst to best.

Mary Ann Duganne Glicksman had come in from Paris (or a village outside it, where, she said, she and a small group of artists from Los Angeles now live) to perform the monologues as she originally had. Cointet, like a movie director, tended to use pretty women, and it is clear that they bring a fair amount of luster to performances that today exist mostly in pictures. Wistful and charming, Glicksman was buckling her red patent leather shoe in front of a television playing her younger self when I mentioned she had drawn a big crowd. "It's not me," she gasped, "it's Guy!" In either case, people streamed into the white room, looking at the bright graphic drawings with text written, often backward (Cointet was ambidextrous), in florid script that resembles Arabic, and settling in rows of folding chairs or on the ground.

*My Father's Diary* from 1975 came first. Glicksman plays Lucy, a character telling of a book (the green trapezoidal object she holds) that her father had given her on his deathbed. "It is a book indeed," she explains, "filled with pages of text and signs and diagrams, lively drawings laid out in a particular way." From there the story sees a war broken out, a fiancé departed, a mass evacuation done under rain of fire and melting metal. There might be a stop at a beach hotel, or that might be a photograph described. (The narrative weaves in and out of the pages and to fade for a moment is to lose the thread.) Sometimes she pauses to "read" a page, her finger tracing crisscrossed lines or loops, the curves of which her intonation follows, and to display history's effects on the diary: ruined diagrams, bullet holes, spilled blood. The story ends when the war does and Lucy has reunited with her fiancé.



Left: Greene Naftali's Jay Sanders with art advisor Thea Westreich. Right: Mary Ann Duganne Glicksman performs *Two Drawings* at Greene Naftali. (Photos: David Velasco)

The actress exited, but the presence of a Sneaky Chef lingered, as we chewed on a cookie of a soap opera with a semiotics exercise baked inside. *Going to the Market*, also from 1975, upped the ante with cleverness. The couple in this one, named Roz and Adul, split up at a party when Adul is perceived to be a two-timer, and, in the end, reunite beside a marketplace. Serving as key to (or map of?) the story is a painting of letters and numbers, series of which Glicksman points to as illustration, spelling out names or the initials of phrases she is saying, revealing them as in a word search. Again, though, much of the work's appeal is in cleverness, and what sticks most is the actress's quick memory.

*Two Drawings* from 1974 is the earliest and the best of the three. On the wall hang two identical compositions of numbers. Glicksman's character explains she bought the first painting, by a craft-fair artist named Jim Brown, for its "aesthetic values," and only "slowly became aware of other things." These other things make up a narrative detailing still another split-up and the quick exit on the next Greyhound of the female, in whose spiraling psyche the narrator finds herself immersed: "The art of Jim Brown," she exclaims, "is quite remarkable!" The second painting, a surprise gift from a friend, is somehow nearly identical to the first one, but shows, deep within its composition, the goings-on of the Raffles Hotel in Singapore. The story becomes a Möbius strip curling onto itself and is stronger for not having the tutorial structure. It ends with a twist, the hotel within the second composition said to hold its own story about a pair of paintings, one of which is seen "glowing in the darkness, the letters shining in blinding flashes."

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Left: Dia director Philippe Vergne. Right: Dealer Carol Greene, Mary Ann Duganne Glicksman, and Greene Naftali's Alex Tuttle. (Photos: David Velasco)