

SYLVIA MARTINS

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Wonderland
Paintings

may 2001

Exhibit **A**

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The work is devout - a "patient, devotional act", as writer Adrian Dannatt puts it. Through the clawlike scratchiness of the surface, to the meditative hush of its overall effect comes symbol after symbol - animals, bodies, flowers. Images, in other words, tumbling from the ether like coins from the mouth of a clock.

And yet the work is timeless. And because of this timelessness the viewer doesn't walk away overburdened by the symbolism or exhausted by the various riddles - both intentional and unintentional - sweeping through the work. On the contrary, they might even feel atoned.

And the work is reverential. Like early Paleolithic art, in which the images serve as some sort of magical ritual to ensure a successful hunt, or the 22,000 year-old so-called Venus of Willendorf in lower Austria, whose bulbous form makes clear her significance as a fertility figure, this is difficult work done in earnest.

This is also work reassuringly unimpressed by art's usual preoccupations with mere fad. Indeed, fad to Martins is probably a slur on the good face of art.

And the good face of art is for all to see in this work. In Martin's earlier days as an artist, when close friendships with the likes of Schnabel, Clemente, and the late great Jean-Michel Basquiat, were not just about art but also about artisans, Martins never lost touch with her work - and always found either the time or the place in which to do it.

Just as there is now in Martins' work a challengingly fresh authority, a further link in the golden chain which began all those canvases ago when Martins left Brasil to study in New York, so too is there a greater appetite now in the world for the nonironic, uncynical statement.

And Martins is no cynic.

Peter Bach

3. NOT DARK YET, 2001

oil and oil sticks on canvas
50x40 in



8. **COME AGAIN, 2001**
oil and oil sticks on canvas
40x40 in

