

the private in his updated classical scenarios. Figures posed in elaborate, politically pointed tableaux might reappear in smaller domestic dramas that are also imbued with the flavor of myth.

Georges's latest group of paintings derives from the story of the hunter Acteon, who stumbled upon Diana bathing in her sacred grove. The vengeful goddess changed him into a stag, leaving him at the mercy of his own hunting hounds.

Georges's Acteon is a modern-day hunter with a blue down vest. A nightmarish double of the love-struck Bottom in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, he has the head of a stag and the body of a man. Pictorially, Georges approaches the chase from a variety of angles. Some paintings are sweeping aerial panoramas in which Acteon is reduced to a tiny figure scrambling across the countryside. In other compositions, Acteon is right at the top of the canvas, seemingly ready to burst out of the frame. In many of these pictures Diana herself, in flight with drawn bow, pursues her victim. In one gigantic red canvas, she hovers near the top of the picture, tilting towards the earth and aiming at an unseen target below. (She's a zaftig goddess, but most of Georges's women have been fairly ample—a quality that reminds me more of Veronese than Tiepolo, to whose figures Georges's are most often compared.) Still other paintings depict the grisly end of the chase with Acteon bloodied and kneeling, surrounded by his tearing and slashing hounds.

The horrific nature of Acteon's story is intensified by Georges's pictorial strategies, which suggest his identification with the doomed hero. But then, Georges's work often has a measure of autobiographical content: one of his recurring themes is the artist and the model—a situation not without its own voyeuristic implications. Of course, the artist means to look. Acteon, on the other hand, saw what he saw by mistake. Still, he paid for his look with his life, and one is tempted to read these paintings as expressions of male rue and dread, field reports from the battle of the sexes.

Georges's pictures are vigorously theatrical restagings of the myth, full of wonderful painterly incident such as the red ground color in *The Red Diana and Acteon*. In the same work two little lakes in the middle distance

are pushed up flat against the picture plane where they curve toward Acteon like knives or scythes. These canvases suggest that classically influenced narrative painting still holds enormous expressive potential for artists of Georges's skill—and nerve.

—Stephen Westfall

Sonia Balassanian at Exit Art

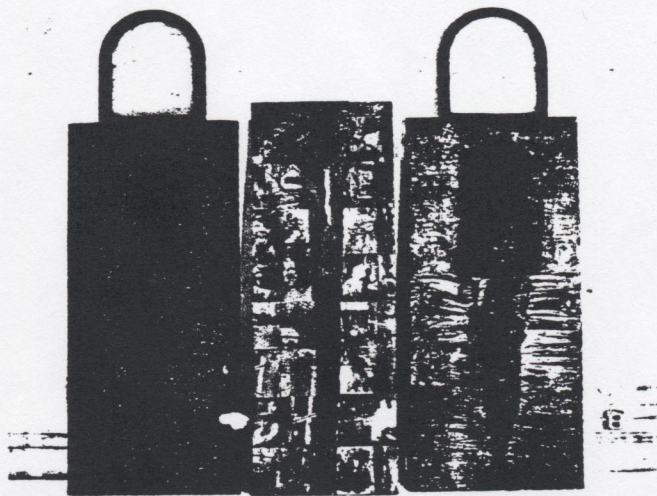
Sonia Balassanian, an Iranian artist who has been living in this country since 1978, has acquired a reputation as a political artist on the basis of two shows: an exhibition at the Elise Meyer gallery of collages which dealt exclusively with the Iran hostage crisis,

and "Black Black Days" at Franklin Furnace, an installation of mournful fragments: coffins, sealed books, empty baby carriages.

In her recent show at Exit Art she stepped beyond immediate political conditions, creating a model of a culture in transport. Initially the show seemed dominated by a series of 43 acrylic paintings of blue, black and brown figures: struggling, mummified, fleeing, mourning, bent and turning in horror. This chorus of gestures was interrupted by real objects: doors, windows, a section of a building. There was also an array of the heavy objects made of dirt that Balassanian employs to make artifacts from ritual: tall spears and masks



Keith Ragone: *Between Blue Rocks*, 1988, oil on canvas, 32 by 40 inches; at Marian Locks.



Sonia Balassanian: *Untitled*, 1988, mixed mediums, 108 by 110 inches; at Exit Art.

marked with ridges of phosphorescent blue.

Doors have replaced the coffins of the artist's earlier work: one with a ridge of dirt splitting it down the middle, another with a drawing on it of a human body marked with white chalk lines that resemble operating instructions. This door has a creepy nightmarish quality that reminds me of Francis Bacon or Goya. A third door, covered with a thick gray coating into which green "jewels," or eyes, are embedded, exudes a meditative, omniscient quality. At the back of the gallery stands what looks like a wall torn from the side of a building. A burnt weapon leans against it, a dark running figure is drawn on it, a metal box juts out from it. Lit from within, the structure looks industrial, like a time clock. It is haunted by two female eyes that peer out from inside.

In a far corner of the gallery Balassanian has created a small chapel, or shrine. This consists of three adjacent doors and above them two windows which are wrapped and sealed shut with strips of cloth. A raised figure lies on the first door. There are two empty holes for a knob and a lock. A thin green rock dangles from a string that's tied to the upper hole—an attractive rock you could hold in your hand, or use as a weapon. In place of a knob, the rock keeps the door open. The second door bears a collage: photos of a mother and child. A boy, a bird in a tree, another boy running to a train station. Here again a ridge of dirt divides the two sides of the door. This more secure, intimate slice of humanity refers to memory rather than gesture. Affixed to the last door is half of a cast of a female torso. Gold glimmers through the ubiquitous layer of dirt. At the end of this garden of disrupted functions and perception, Balassanian seems to be unearthing an idealized woman—it's the only hope she's got.

—Eileen Myles

PHILADELPHIA

Keith Ragone at Marian Locks

In these 16 beautifully painted works from the past three years, Keith Ragone has taken moving water—usually water slapping against rocks or a shoreline—as his point of departure. Without being dreamy or saccharine, Ragone can easily cause one to