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Art in Review

By Roberta Smith

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ALEXANDER GORLIZKI

'The First Time I Heard You Blink'

Greenberg Van Doren

730 Fifth Avenue at 57th Street

Manhattan

Through Saturday

Alexander Gorlizki's first gallery show in this country is tantalizingly rich with charm, ideas and confusion, and even comes with built-in self-criticism. Mr. Gorlizki, a British artist based in New York, has identified himself as "obsessed with Indian miniature paintings." As this crowded show of 49 small paintings on paper attests, he plays out this obsession by designing images that are mostly executed according to his instructions at a workshop in Jaipur, India, headed by an artist named Riyaz Uddin. The works may pass back and forth between New York and Jaipur several times over the course of a few years before Mr. Gorlizki deems them complete.

The results are paintings that are profuse with ultra-refined patterns and motifs culled from cultures around the globe: stylized waves from Japanese kimonos, Victorian lace, Malaysian textiles. On top of these may be silhouettes (also patterned) of figures taken from photographs or plainer biomorphic shapes that suggest an admiration for the work of Ken Price. The ceramics of Kathy Butterly also come to mind, especially in "Exercise in Restraint," where bright blue frog legs are arranged on a cluster of little hooked rugs against a background of pink blossoms on yellow.

"How to Influence People" centers on the silhouettes of two men sitting in armchairs — one wearing a Western business suit, the other a less Western robe — and presents several contrasting, mostly brown, patterns. Instead of heads, large sprigs of coral sprout from the men's necks — an exotic material frequently found in European cabinets of wonders. The solid coral color and blunt shapes are a saving grace, but the works, like many others with collaged photographs of people, compare well with similar pieces by Christian Holstad.

While seductive, the patterns that Mr. Gorlizki elicits from Mr. Uddin's artisans start to feel rote-like and oppressive after a while, and the forms that stand out against them tend to remain scattered, rather than providing the relief of a larger, more cohesive composition. His efforts strengthen when abstract shapes resembling splashes of liquid dominate, as in "Blue Notes," "Look Out" and "Immaculate Spill."

But it is telling that ultimately the liveliest sight here is a wall covered with scores of studies, found images and partly finished works from Mr. Gorlizki's studio. A second, stronger show could easily be selected from this array. It suggests that the artist may have learned enough from his Indian collaborators to proceed on his own. He might also think about losing the photographic images and silhouettes.

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