

# The Fragility of the Soul: Insights from PIA STERN

Art Review by **Grady Harp**



PHOTO OF ARTIST AT WORK

We work in the dark  
We do what we can  
We give what we have  
Our doubt is our passion and  
Our passion is our task  
The rest is the madness of art.

— *Henry James*

**P**IA STERN makes art and in doing so she explores the mysteries of existence, not by painting images as though channeled from a universal source, but rather by approaching a canvas or paper, languishing in the multiple layers of rich color she brushes into existence, until a flicker of an idea in the space she has created allows her to mine the ideas that are at once universal and personal.

Stern has always straddled that line between abstraction and representation, finding a language of her own that allows her to open portals of exploration for those who stand before her

finished works. Her paintings range from large canvases to small works on paper, but no matter the size of the confined resulting statement, the messages range from contemplative and spiritual to flashes of whimsy and childlike glee. Painting for Pia Stern is a confrontation with personal dialogues: conversations that emerge from her canvases reflect a woman fascinated with the power of nature and the vastness of the universe, the interplay of light and dark, and the searching for the role of man in the enormity of it all.

Across the lushly colorful surfaces Stern creates are scraffito-like images that seem to



**VOL DE NUIT**

defined fishes and nebulous circles, and near human like figures – gather in the band of earthbound dark surrounded above and below by a mysterious light source.

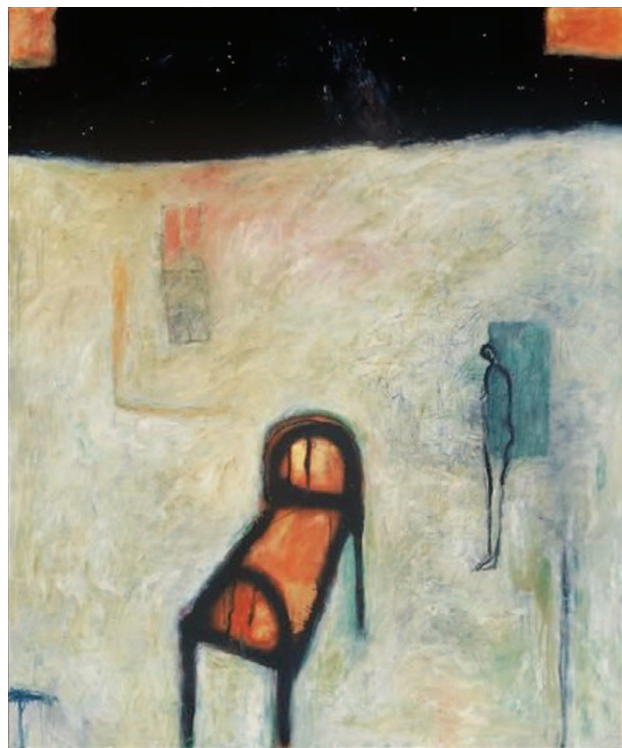
In some of her more representational works such as **Portal**, the artist allows the viewer to decide which of the elements drawn – the bed, the door, the window, or the central position of the proscenium square – represents the entry/exit of the outlined human figure. In **Rondo for Galileo** she shares a vision of the celestial bodies of the universe in a dance-like aggregation. And returning to earthly delights **In the**



**THE LAST REMAINING PIECES**

emerge from the divisions of dark and light, water and air, the known and the unknown. In **Vol de Nuit** a moon cloud hovers over a ghostly terrain: a bicycle suggests the transportive means of the title's night flight. In **The Last Remaining Pieces** several of Stern's artistic icons appear – the boats that always seem adrift,

**PORTAL**





**IN THE GARDEN**

**Garden** gathers all the elements of Stern's homage to the mystery of life and beauty.

If all of Stern's successful career as an artist and philosopher can be summarized in one painting, that painting would be **The History of Man** – a complex and vast journey through many of the elements that make her work so durable in this ever changing world of art. Careful study of this magnificent painting quietly offers entry into



**RONDO FOR GALILEO**

the complex and gently vulnerable world of Pia Stern, an immensely gifted artist whose influence extends beyond the confines of her unique paintings. Pia Stern is a contemporary shaman.



**HISTORY OF MAN**