94. *Portrait of a young American friend*, by Egisto Fabbri. 1892. Canvas, 137 by 84 cm. (Drusilla Gucci Caffarelli; exh. Palazzo Strozzi, Florence).

Vedder, who got to know them during his three-year stay in Florence in the 1850s, as can be seen from the five works by him included in the exhibition (Fig.92).

Palazzo Strozzi, Florence's most important and largest exhibition space, is very well run by the extremely dynamic James M. Bradburne, whose declared intent is to provide incentives for visitors to the palace to explore other places in Florence, especially those off the beaten track (with the help of an ingenious 'passport'). This is a new approach for Florence and definitely a step in the right direction as a way to deal with its ever-increasing numbers of visitors.

[1] Catalogue: *Americans in Florence: Sargent and the American Impressionists*. Edited by Francesca Bardazzi and Carlo Sisi. 288 pp. incl. 155 col. + 25 b. & w. ills. (Marsilio Editori, Venice, 2012), €30. ISBN 978–88–317–1199–9. Italian edition: ISBN 978–88–317–1038–1. It is a pity that the description of each exhibited work is not by its illustration, but instead relegated to the appendix at the end, and there is some repetition of information between the various entries and some slips in the English translation, reflecting perhaps the lack of a general editor, although a helpful index of names is provided.

[2] Some of these paintings were seen in the major exhibition held in 2002–03; R. Ormond and E. Kilmurray, eds.: exh. cat. *Sargent e l'Italia*, Ferrara (Palazzo dei Diamanti), Los Angeles (County Museum of Art) and Denver (Art Museum) 2002–03; reviewed in this Magazine, 145 (2003), pp.318–19.

[3] F. Bardazzi, ed.: exh. cat. *Cézanne a Firenze (due collezonisti e la mostra dell'Impressionismo del 1910)*, Florence (Palazzo Strozzi) 2007; reviewed by the present writer in this Magazine, 149 (2007), pp.508–09.

John Chamberlain

New York and Bilbao

by DAVID ANFAM

LIKE GLITZY TOYS poised on a giant whirligig, the works in *John Chamberlain: Choices*, seen by this reviewer at the **Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York** (closed 13th May; travelling next year to **Bilbao**), answered remarkably well to Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural folly. Unfolding with its streamlined smoothness, the Guggenheim's retro-moderne spiral enhanced the crunched and bunched energies that crackle through Chamberlain's sculptures (Fig.95). In fact, the overall impression was of a marriage so apt – with the more frontal pieces hung on the walls, while the majority were parked within, or in front of, the recesses on the ramp – that the display could have been arranged in almost any order with equal success. That said, the mainly chronological installation emphasised the consistency of Chamberlain's achievement in both positive and negative ways. His vision changed little; it just grew bigger and, on the whole, better. In this respect (more than for any superficial formal resemblances), Chamberlain followed such Abstract Expressionists as Rothko, Kline and Reinhardt, who rang numerous variations on a signature style rather than constantly inventing fresh image types. Unlike those peers, however, he aspired neither to the tragic, the timeless nor the monochromatic. On the contrary, Chamberlain celebrated matter and colour in their most jubilantly raucous, commercial incarnations. These are carnivalesque confections fit to inhabit some modern, industrial paradise garden. More than many other twentieth-century sculptures, they ring and zing – onomatopoeia made metal.

Chamberlain (who died last year) and David Smith were both born in Indiana and grew up in the Midwest between the wars. Thus, these two future metal meisters were heir to an American ideology of what may be called 'industrial romanticism', the antithesis to an earlier Romantic era's animus towards the dehumanising effects of the Industrial Revolution and its long shadow. In this cultural climate railways, steamships, cars, planes and all the kindred mechanical gizmos that had pushed America to the forefront of the West in terms of production and technological prowess assumed the kind of heroic, even fetishistic, allure that had hitherto belonged to the human body. Chamberlain's early *Calliope* (cat. no.1; 1954) illustrates his simultaneous debt to, and fundamental difference from, Smith. Each shares the González–Picasso predilection for welding as a means to articulate the age of iron. But the linear structure of *Calliope* represents the path not taken. Henceforth Chamberlain abjured open spaces for enclosed volumes, sparse drawing for intricate surfaces. Consequently, it was not long before the Guggenheim's display suggested a lapidary Vulcan who relished the optical lushness that had once been the prerogative of, say, Venetian painterliness or Rubensian flesh. Behind Chamberlain's ostensible toughness and putative savagery stands a frou-frou softness – Detroit, as it were, turned Rococo and Boucher-like. No wonder the most accurate windows onto this sensibility come from the cinema. In films that include Kenneth Anger's *Kustom kar kommandos* (1965) and John Carpenter's *Christine* (1983), the candy colours and shining curves of automobiles stand proxy for carnal seductiveness.

Nonetheless, in retrospect the wonder is that Chamberlain's works were ever stereotyped in relation to car crashes. Collisions bespeak fragmentation and loss, whereas these sculptures are consistently unified and insistently present. Rather than deathly (notwithstanding a frequent aura of flashy risk-taking), they are bundles of activity and consumerism, as titles of the order of *Women's voices*, *Nudepearls one* and *Opera chocolates*, attest. Furthermore, as Dave Hickey stresses in the accompanying catalogue, echoes of Baroque drapery and, *ipso facto*, the anatomies that it covers are never far away.[1] This observation has two corollaries: desire and drive. Desire because drapery conceals a coveted object, the body; and drive because

95. Installation view of *John Chamberlain: Choices*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2012.

old-masterly garments, with their ubiquitous folds and flutters, presuppose some ulterior force animating them. Are there more wind-driven clothings than those depicted by Michelangelo and Bernini?

Key to Chamberlain's technique was an essentially linguistic device, enjambment: evident in the constant pressing together of parts, which he famously celebrated in terms of their 'fit', as well as in the compound verbal structures of his fantastical titles. The radically experimental poet Charles Olson, whom the artist encountered in 1955 while at Black Mountain College, surely informed this principle. As Olson had conceived his 'projective verse' as a high-energy construct conditioned by the span of the poet's breathing and largely irrespective of normative sense patterns, so Chamberlain's sculptures collide disparities together into comparable tectonic ideograms. This is why he was at heart a collagist. It also explains why the nearest precedent for, say, *Dolores James* (Fig.96) is less the much-touted example of de Kooning's and Kline's gesturalism than it is Umberto Boccioni's *Dynamism of a speeding horse + houses* (1914; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice). The faint whiff of absurdity that hangs over this vein of Futurism became in Chamberlain's hands a full-fledged ludic and comical impulse. Here, nature and culture[2] – the metal constructions often have a geological air about them, just as the urethane foam pieces invoke fruits[3] – enact monstrously fecund couplings. Likewise, erstwhile inanimate substances, ranging from steel (painted, galvanised, chromium- or tin-plated and Cor-Ten) and aluminium to the aforementioned foam, fabric, lacquered Formica, paper and mineral-coated synthetic resin, behave as if they were propelled by polymorphous perverse urges. The Guggenheim's selection gave a good account of this multifariousness. The same applied to Chamberlain's keen grasp of scale. In New York this extended from the giant columnar *C'estzesty* (no.106), installed outside the building, to the little fist-sized maquettes dating from 1961–62, which are deliciously cute. Less so the late aluminium foil-coated creations which seem problematic, elephantine and facile, rather than ingenious and manic. By contrast, Don Quaintance's lexicon in the catalogue elucidating the titles is a quiet coup that helps add further layers to the enjoyment and understanding of Chamberlain's Rabelaisian world. The titles also reflect their maker's capacious imagination, which encompassed allusions to spheres as disparate as neurology, Greek mythology, Elizabethan bear-baiting, astronomy, rock and roll and, above all, sex. An expansive personality, Chamberlain evidently had a libido to match. In his own words: 'I just run on intuition and use that as a general mediator among emotion and sexuality and drive'. Accordingly, it is the quality of excess about the sculptures that causes them to appear so ambiguously erotic, metamorphic and yet, in the last resort, oddly cohesive too (Fig.97). Profusion – of colour, shape, texture, scale, dynamics and mood – is

96. *Dolores James*, by John Chamberlain. 1962. Painted and chromium-plated steel, 184.2 by 257.8 by 117.5 cm. (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York).

packed together to the point at which the surfeit of effects prompts the viewer to regard them as resembling a multitude of things and phenomena without ever settling into a single likeness.

Ultimately, what haunts Chamberlain's art is the American Dream. It is there not just in the many cues to Americana (from the title *Marilyn Monroe* to the vintage cars that yielded his raw components), but also in the general swing of the work between a larger-than-life gorgeousness and garbage. The former is exemplified in the sculptures' eye-popping hues and labyrinthine patterns, their glossiness and overwhelming 'wow' factor. The latter comes across in the trashy materials, sickly sensuality, raggedness and fundamental look of ruination. The dichotomy is compelling. Perhaps certain references that Chamberlain made to Venice are pure accident, as in, for example, *Ca-d'oro* and his *Gondola* series. More certain, though, is that historically Venice – with its lustrous wares, glamour, fabled licentiousness (a brothel in Elizabethan London simply took the name of the city), storied degradation and inevitable ruin (witness Ruskin and Thomas Mann, for example) – represented the archetypal polarities to which Chamberlain gave such timely shape.[4]

97. *Divine ricochet*, by John Chamberlain. 1991. Painted and chromium-plated steel and stainless steel, 138.4 by 180.5 by 169 cm. (Private collection, Düsseldorf, courtesy of Galerie Karsten Greve, Cologne; exh. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York).

[1] Catalogue: *John Chamberlain: Choices*. Edited by Susan Davidson, with contributions by Donna De Salvo, Dave Hickey, Helen Hsu, Adrian Kohn, Don Quaintance and Charles Ray. 248 pp. incl. 178 col. + 44 b. & w. ills. (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, 2012), $65 (HB). ISBN 978–0–89207–4259.

[2] In this respect, T. Crow: *John Chamberlain: New Sculptures*, New York 2012, makes some interesting points.

[3] *Mannabend ra* (no.41) is blatantly banana-like, while the wooden beads in *Untitled #7* (no.42) mimic blueberries.

[4] For a brilliant analysis of these polarities, see T. Tanner: *Venice Desired*, Oxford 1992.

Charline von Heyl

Philadelphia and Boston

by LYNNE COOKE

PAINTING APPEARS AT once in the forefront and at the margins of today's art world; it occupies the centre of public attention owing to its relation to the market and celebrity (witness the astounding auction records constantly being set, then overturned, for such figures as Gerhard Richter, Christopher Wool, Luc Tuymans and Peter Doig), and yet it exists on the periphery of critical discourse, where it generally fails to gain more than a cursory nod. This schizoid position is far from new, although it has become exacerbated in recent years: the market continues to climb to unprecedented heights in an era of widespread financial crisis; meanwhile, critical theory has still not come to terms with the contributions of a number of formidable painters whose careers now span some two decades. These painters do not comprise a group in any identifiable sense, although they are all legatees of certain conceptual positions forged in the 1980s. Among them is a significant percentage of women: Charline von Heyl, Amy Sillman and Rebecca Quaytman. Of these, Von Heyl is the only European, although like those peers, and others, such as Wade Guyton and Kelly Walker, she has spent the past decade living and working in New York City.

As a transplanted German, Von Heyl has had to negotiate two quite different milieus. Her formative years were spent in Cologne in the 1980s, a scene dominated by Neo-expressionist tendencies, epitomised in the paintings of the Neue Wilde and their virulent opponents, among whom the ironic 'bad boy', Martin Kippenberger, was pre-eminent. As a former student of Jörg Immendorf, Von Heyl must have gained useful insights into the ways in which political positions could be incorporated into an artistic strategy. Feminism has, nonetheless, been deployed more in the