

# ARTnews

## Reviews: [New York](#)

### John Walker

#### Knoedler

This generous sampling of abstract collages affirmed John Walker's status as a master of two-dimensional mixed media, whether he is working on a small and subdued scale (18 inches high) or in heroic dimensions (122 by 96 inches). His works, which summon up a host of associations, from urban graffiti to Matissean cutouts, fell into two groups: the first, from 1974 to 1978, when the British-born painter was in residence in the United States; the second, mostly from 2003, after he had settled here. The difference in mood between the two was



John Walker, *Juggernaut with Plume for P. Neruda*, 1975, acrylic, French chalk, and canvas collage on canvas, 120 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 97 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Knoedler.

profound. Though there are occasional passages of bright-hued, ragged whimsy in them, the earlier collages are generally somber, a massive pileup of shapes cohering through drawn lines and the opposition of complementaries, such as the blues and yellows of *Ostraca I* (1977). The funereal aspect of *Juggernaut with Plume for P. Neruda* (1975), realized in chalky grays with wines and sienas, is probably no accident, painted as it was two years after the Chilean poet's death.

Though Walker has said that the later series of untitled works reflects his passion for the Maine coast, there are few obvious landscape references other than bright ultramarine grace notes, the occasional hint of a horizon, and muddy slatherings made from just that—watery mud. These are boisterous collisions of organic shapes, explosive brushwork, and scriptlike scrawls that tease at but never quite resolve themselves into written words. While the scribbles, as Dore Ashton writes in the catalogue, may have been inspired by rural road signs, they also have the exuberance of exclamations spray-painted on rocks and bridges and fleetingly glimpsed along the highway. These latest works had the kind of masterly buoyancy that could be achieved only after years of disciplined, calculated work.

—Ann Landi