

**Art in America**  
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**Irving Kriesberg at Peter Findlay**  
**by Elisa Decker**

Judging from the vigorous sweep of 14 large oil paintings (more than half of them from 2002 to 2004) highlighted in his recent exhibition "The Dance," Irving Kriesberg hasn't missed a beat since 2001, when, at 82, he received the Lee Krasner Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. The show also featured earlier work: six canvases and four smaller pastel drawings. A figurative expressionist painter since the early '50s, Kriesberg was included, along with Bazziotes, Dickinson, Pollock, Rothko, Still and others, in MOMA's landmark 1952 exhibition "15 Americans." Although he has long been based in New York, early sojourns in Mexico and India had a lasting influence on his work.

Gestural paint handling and high-key color coalesce in the stylized figures that seem to flow freely from Kriesberg's unconscious. His paintings offer a bemusing iconography in which sometimes cartoonish animals play a prominent role. In the 68-by-45-inch oil on canvas "Final Dance" (2002), fauvist dashes of vermilion, viridian, brown and black against a white ground form a skeletal stick figure with a ram's head. Its partner, a downy, barrel-chested creature that looks like a man in sheep's clothing, takes the lead. The goat/skeleton kicks back its heels in abandon, recalling Mexican Day of the Dead celebrations, its frenzied activity emphasized by Kriesberg's having given it two sets of vertebrae and two left arms, one of them waving wildly overhead, the other held by its partner. The space behind this bizarre couple drops off into a sky-blue ovoid speckled with orange, where black birds fly into the violet beyond. Down below, a small white bird is poised to take off as it morphs into one of the ominous black silhouettes that are reminiscent of van Gogh's crows.

In "Sweep" (2003), two- and four-legged creatures, roughed out in aqua, green or yellow-orange and often delineated in red, seem to strain against the pull of gravity as they travel diagonally across the lavender patchwork of the earth's curve. A white bird of prey hovers above what appears to be a mass exodus of fleeing animals. A pair of tiny-headed yellowish giants herds the mob along, the simian reach of their arms echoing the horizon line and the wings of the watching white bird. Kriesberg plays his large, flat shapes against the speed of his paint handling, contrasting stillness against motion. As the artist has remarked apropos of his own work, "dream images are meant to express some mystic order."