



**Stephanie Rose, *Way Up Here*, 1989, oil and acrylic on canvas, 80 inches in diameter. E. M. Donahue.**

## STEPHANIE ROSE

**E. M. Donahue**

**S**tephanie Rose is one of the few contemporary painters using the stylistic juxtapositions of postmodernism to create a compellingly personal symbolic language—a language of forms drawn from the media and art history but internalized and transformed into a dense web of associations and relationships.

*Make Believe #5* provides an anthology of Rose's images—a richly worked red background reminiscent of both color-field painting and Abstract Expressionist brushwork; a towering, menacing figure composed of biomorphic shapes in reds, yellows, and grays; and a more fragile green figure at the center with a square top tenuously supported by a sinuous organic column, looking like a kind of comic book intestinal fantasy. A stylized tabletop still life humorously takes off on early Cubism; and a painting set within a painting at the upper right of the canvas is filled with totemic columns recalling David Smith's sculptures.

On one level these juxtapositions reflect the predicament of artists at a moment when all styles seem available but none are especially compelling; on another, they present a personal history of choices and preferences held together against time and fashion. But if *Make Believe #5* holds everything in stasis, the more recent paintings dive into the conceptual space of the inset painting—an intense world composed of garishly bright colors and almost night-

marish incident.

That world seems precarious and anxious in several of these works, despite the gaudy bravado of the acid greens and vulgar pinks trying to say it's all a joke. In *Lift* and *Riddle*, dark, tenuously balanced block (possibly female) figures loom over a kicking, screaming cartoon kid, threatening to crush it. But in *Talking Pictures* and *Way Up Here*, Rose breaks through the nightmares, keeping all the tensions perfectly balanced to create a vision at once complex and calmly assured. In the monumental *Talking Pictures*, the blue totem at left gives support to the massive black shape balanced on a point; and a weightless group of golden scrolls, bars, and lozenges dance around a predominantly green-and-red biomorphic form—a figure both open to the world and at peace.

—Dan Rubey

VOLUME 89, NUMBER 3  
FOUNDED 1902

**ARTnews**  
MARCH 1990