

Becoming unnitched

UP CLOSE
WITH MICHEL PELLUS
AND PETER NERO

BY BOB BRINK

Michel Pellus has invented his own terms

to describe the phases of his art. He hasn't put a label on himself, but an apt one might be "malcontent" — in the best sense of the word.

Pellus, whose painting has been pegged by others as photo-realism, is something of a rebel, following his own muse on the pathways of life. The fact that he eschews the standard terminology for artistic styles is itself evidence of this independent streak.

But if the Fort Lauderdale resident has been an individualist, he was, at a young age, a rebel without a cause. The son of artistic parents in Montreal, he moved to Miami in 1964, at age 19, "just to make a break from the family and go off on my own." He studied physical education in college and competed in gymnastics, then switched his studies to aeronautics, intending to become a pilot.

Finally, at age 26, he decided to paint. After all, his father had taught art at the Ecole des Beaux Arts for 35 years, and his mother, Madame Roy-Pellus (now in a



Mood 3, 40" x 96", Michel Pellus



The Shoe, 90" x 90", Michel Pellus

nursing home in Aventura), also painted. The young Pellus' first paintings were monochromes, but after 1½ years, "I picked up my own style. It was naive, primitive, childish painting, and in that context I inserted people who were very real. I called that 'subjective realism.' You had a very ambivalent reaction to it."

Eleanor Ettinger, publisher of Norman Rockwell works, and Levine and Levine, which published Salvador Dali's art, turned out two editions of Pellus' production until 1983.

But, says Pellus, "I felt like I was going around in circles — meaning I was painting Pelluses. You get hung up on your style and carry it too far." He had returned to Canada and, deciding he needed a change of scenery — literally — he moved with his then-wife to an island in the Bahamas. He took trips to New York, returning with photographs from which he would compose urban scenes on canvas.

These paintings, he says, "don't fall into either photo-realism or hyperrealism.

It's close to photo-realism, but not quite. There's a stiffness in photo-realism, a crystallization, so that it can't move. I soften that up; I don't go that far. I don't have those sharp edges. You give the impression of motion, or nonstiffness, that way."

Pellus' current phase of painting is what he calls

"macro-realism" — close-ups with still lifes and people as subjects. These are very large works, some reaching as

EXPRESSIONS

high as 10 feet. The feeling of being close up is enhanced by the portrayal of only part of the subject — a woman with her head cropped out, or a teacup with only half of it showing.

"I had never liked still lifes, until I decided to make them big," he says. "Still lifes are usually studies, classically speaking — used to teach students light and shading, and so forth. By making them big, I give them a whole personality. The size is part of the composition. The painting, if small, would not be interesting. By making it 5, 6, 7 feet, it becomes an entity."

Pellus isn't sure of what he is trying to convey with the close-ups. "I'm following a flow," he says searchingly, "a feel that's in my head, but not identified totally at this point, even to myself." And he shuns conscious analysis.

"If I identify it," he says, "I might kill it."

New oils on canvas by Michel Pellus will be displayed Nov. 9 to Dec. 12 at Caesarea Gallery, 608 Banyan Trail, Boca Raton. (561-995-0985)



Blue dress, 96" x 48",
Michel Pellus