

Pamela Sienna

My exhibition resume includes 21 solo painting exhibitions and my artwork had been in 12 museum exhibitions. My paintings and drawings have been included in numerous gallery group exhibitions and are in private art collections around the world.

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Compiled Critical Reviews 1983-2011

Also of note: 2012

[100 Boston Painters](#), book by Chawky Frenn, Schiffer Publishing. Atglen, PA.
Pamela Sienna on pages 188-189 with four images of paintings

2011

Pamela Sienna has several pieces in the exhibition, and her work is visually arresting. In *Monument #1*, the color is so luminous and vivid, it almost looks 3D. The subject looks like a bundle of three different brightly colored velvet drapes or throws, wrapped with two different types of rope. One's response is visceral: it's the color that does it. She says, 'I allow my images to be as precise and elusive as poetic language.' She says that the wrapped forms suggest "both secrets kept, and the promise of a gift." If we are thinking about it like poetic language, I am reminded of someone like e.e. Cummings. His words feel precious, carefully chosen, as do her folds of fabric and the way the light hits them.

Laura A. Partridge. 2011 [AEQAI publication](#)

Partridge, Laura A. "The Miller Gallery presents Contemporary Realism" AEQAI aeqai.com October 2011

2011

In the fifth-floor Mayor's Gallery hangs "Beyond Description," a show of oil paintings by East Boston resident Pamela Sienna, whose hyper-real works are mostly still-lives of objects inscrutably concealed within vividly colored cloth wrappings.

The manner of Sienna's work derives from Baroque painting, particularly Caravaggio, in its intense interplay of lights and darks as well as its embrace of visual chaos over the rigid order of Renaissance painting.

“Cloth is perfect for that,” she said, “because when you start out painting it, it’s all abstract. Because all you can do is try to make marks of light and dark, and as you hone your craft more and more ... then you find, ‘Oh, it’s a package.’ ‘Oh, it’s a drapery.’”

Sienna said the highly detailed realism of work like hers makes it relatively easy for a viewer to digest but much more complex – and time-consuming - for the artist to create.

“The viewer can just walk up and go, ‘Oh, I accept that as a piece of cloth.” she said. “And it’s very simple for the viewer, but it takes a long, long process to find the order in it for the painter.”

Once Sienna painted large figures, often nudes, but as the time she spent on each painting grew, it became more and more difficult to have a live model from the beginning to the end. Simultaneously, she found herself becoming more interested in the complex folds of the fabrics she draped as backdrops for the figures, until she ultimately focused her energies on just those reliable, static objects.

She began painting the mysteriously wrapped packages that dominate her recent work, she said, because “privacy has become a really rare commodity, and I feel that we need a place to put our private things.”

What might be inside the wrappings?

“I’m throwing the reaction into the viewer’s court,” she said. “My job is done, and now you can take over and put whatever you want into it.”

Jeremy C. Fox. 2011 [The Boston Globe](#)

Fox, Jeremy. C. "City Hall recognizes local artists for Women’s History Month " [The Boston Globe boston.com](#), March 9, 2011

2010

Sienna is a great name for a painter, especially one who uses oils. “Pamela Sienna: Paintings and Drawings” (“Packed” pictured) is a collection of 20 pieces by the Boston-based artist who produces vividly colored and detailed realist oils. Her subjects of cotton and satin cloth with twisted cords, ribbons, and string are created with a *colorito* technique that incorporates layers of glazing. In the artist’s words: “I see cloth as a defining element of civilization. Fabric does not dictate form but holds it – responding to form or concealing it.” The Gallery at Boston Art & Framing, 100 Charles St. Boston, MA.

June Wulff. 2010 [The Boston Globe](#)

Wulff, June. "Brush with civilization" [The Boston Globe, Living section](#), November 23, 2010

2008

[The Object Project -] Of course, there were pieces that stood out most literally, where the artists used color as a bludgeon: F. Scott Hess and his family scenes... and Pamela Sienna's with her knock-your-eyes-out neon paintings of torn photos and drawings of atomic mushroom clouds and moths.

Elizabeth Downing. 2008 Art Focus, Oklahoma

Downing, Elizabeth. "Object Project" Art Focus, November 12, 2008

2008

Pamela Sienna's "Primary Phase" is a stew of those three basic colors on the color wheel. A dark blue, clouded night sky makes up the background, while the foreground is dominated by luminescent bunches of red, orange and yellow drapery that look straight out of a Van Eyck painting.

Nat McKnight. 2008 Urban Tulsa Weekly Tulsa, OK

McKnight, Nat. "Uncommon Objects: Fifteen artists viewpoints" Urban Tulsa Weekly, June 25, 2008

2007

Boston-based artist PAMELA SIENNA's oil painting at MILLER GALLERY, "Secrets of Civilization #2," is a tightly rendered still life of packages wrapped in fabric and string. The three packages – one royal blue, one peacock blue, one white – lay on a pale blue cloth before a vivid violet background. A lilac drapery hangs above, lending a baroque sense of theatricality to the composition.

Sienna handles her paint much like the Northern Renaissance masters, building up between 15 and 20 layers of oil glazes for illusionistic effect. Light penetrates through these layers of paint and bounces back to our eyes, creating glowing, jewel-like colors. It's as if you could stroke the draped, satin cloth or untie the string with your fingers.

As the viewer gets caught up in the beauty of lush surfaces, however, clues reveal a darker message. Photograph fragments are strewn across the foreground, showing an airplane, flames, smoke and a fiery explosion – probable references to Sept. 11, 2001.

"There is a great sense of mystery to her work," says Miller Gallery Director Rosemary Seidner. "One of the really intriguing things is that there are actual objects inside the packages, but she never reveals what they are."

This mystery accounts for the paintings' irony. The packages are almost sacred objects, exquisitely wrapped and symmetrically placed in the composition. Yet, because we've been

conditioned to be wary of suspicious packages, we can't help feel a bit uneasy about what is beneath the lovely wrappings.

Both beautiful and foreboding, Sienna's painting hints at our culture's underlying current of paranoia and fear. Sienna's work appears in Rosemary's Babies, a selection of Seidner's favorite new works, at Miller Gallery (2715 Erie Ave., Hyde Park) through Feb. 3.

Tamera Lenz Munte. 2007 City Beat, Cincinnati News and Entertainment Weekly
Munte, Tamera Lenz. "Focal Point – Secrets of Civilization #2" Cincinnati City Beat, January 24, 2007

2003

Pamela Sienna conceived the series of "wrapped package" paintings that she continues to work on three years [ago] ... A believer in Yeats's observation that a work of art is the social act of a solitary person, Sienna...juxtapos[es] in multiple but various treatments of the scene, a paradoxically beautiful image of the iconographic nuclear blast (not always your typical mushroom cloud) with the equally symbolic yet more mysterious image of a wrapped package on the unblemished plane of bright color in the foreground. To get the best images, she went right to the source – not to Pakistan, China, North Korea, or Russia, but to the largest manufacturer of weaponry in the world. The U.S. Department of Energy, obliged by the Freedom of Information Act to provide images from the roughly 900 bomb tests done...from the early 1950's to the mid -1970's, complied with her request. "I was brought up in the age of atomic anxiety," says Sienna of her current preoccupation. Unlike some baby-boom-generation artists, this representational but not quite realist painter has never found solace for that anxiety in abstraction (what she calls "the part of the painting process that takes just the first couple of hours"...). Nor does she speak glowingly of painting that's "less about painting than it is about theory or concepts based on concepts." A hardworking craftsperson who acknowledges that it takes years to learn how to paint in the vivid representational style she loves, she derides trends toward the frivolous in the art world...and "the same 20 painters you see in all the...museums." And she says of those who declared painting dead in the 1990's: "They weren't looking!"

It is evident from a glance at Sienna's symbolically loaded paintings (inspired in part by the wrapped packages and eerie realism of Chilean artist Claudio Bravo) that they require a great deal of labor and a very steady hand. In the late-night solitude of her studio, she applies – one at a time, with small brushes – the 15 or 20 layers of glaze (paint diluted with linseed oil) that add up to a single painting, eventually achieving the transparent yet brilliantly colored effect... Sienna's background images of nuclear explosions, deadly and luminous formations of

yellow and red flame, sometimes fringed by coils, rolls, blankets, plumes, or billowing pillows of white or gray smoke, can take the shape of a flower, a helmet, a screw, or the legendary mushroom. By themselves on the hardboard panels, the fires would be impressive illusionist paintings worth a bit of comparison and contrast on their own. But the placement of the mysterious gift in the foreground provides an element of cryptic mystery that doubles the attention. Is the nuclear fire a thing of beauty forever? Is the generous gift actually something as deadly as the nuclear fire? Which connotation of the symbol should we settle on?

These jeopardizing questions are presented in clear, visually symbolic language in...the paintings...[at] Arden Gallery, at 129 Newbury Street in Boston... In *Last Possession*, the draped and bundled gift lies not quite squarely in the foreground of the picture on the dark red desert-like plane that recedes even more darkly to the horizon. A cream-colored cloth textured with as many curious creases and folds as the coat of a soldier in a Caravaggio painting or a tablecloth in a Dutch still life, and tied up loosely in a loopy length of braided red rope that itself demands admiration, the package simultaneously invites and resists interpretation, attracts and repels the hand drawn to its *trompe l'oeil* temptation. The blank sky above the razor's-edge horizon sets off the dragon-red furls of flame that come to a head in a brilliant ball of yellow flame. ...

There's no telling – and Pamela Sienna, as private in person as the packages in the paintings, isn't saying, even if she knows – what's in the slightly lumpier rectangular shape concealed by a startling red drapery in *Too Bright To Sleep*. Whatever ominous or gentle gift rests on the blue plane that takes up the lower half of the picture plane, no one is likely to emerge from the volcanic cone of yellow flame on the horizon (under a deep red sky) to cut the translucent ribbon that Sienna has gone to the somewhat sinister trouble of wrapping it with. A red thumbtack stuck in the foreground throws a dark shadow toward the package, and a scrap of paper blackened by the fire beckons the imagination.

The Arden Gallery, under the ownership of Hope Arden Turner, has represented Sienna's pretty, apocalyptic work for three years, apparently since she began to gift-wrap these ominous packages. In addition to the packages, the gallery sells the remaining few unsold results of Sienna's 1994 series *27 paintings of Bodies and Bombs* – unabashedly unsubtle juxtapositions of nudes and nukes instead of gifts and nukes. These include at least two small paintings of Joseph R. McCarthy, the notorious United States senator who conducted hearings in the 1950's targeted at those whom he classified as Communists. Pamela Sienna has placed herself next to the senator in one of the paintings, depicting herself as a toddler of the times looking up at the kind of black-and-white television that broadcast the hearings. Sitting on...[a tiny chair], she's

wearing a blue dress and white socks against a deep red background that concurrently alludes to “red” Communism and the first color of the American flag. She’s home alone in that social context, a child who’ll be taught to unwrap her first concealed gifts soon, unaware quite yet of the role her country is playing in the world.

Scott Ruescher. 2003 ARTS Editor Boston, MA

Ruescher, Scott. "Packs and Plumes, experiencing Pamela Sienna’s artwork" ARTS Editor, Boston, MA, April 2003 online issue, three images

2002

What is realism – the style or the subject? A new show by five very different artists at Plum Gallery on Water Street makes it clear that the answer is not always...well...clear.

Pamela Sienna, for example, paints the most improbable situations in the most photographic manner. ...

Sienna’s oils feature unidentifiable wrapped objects in the foreground with cataclysmic events – an atomic explosion, columns of smoke and fire or violent thunderstorms – taking place in the background. Accents, like a key, a shred of paper and length of twine add to the ambiguity of what’s taking place in these cleverly manipulated, subconscious dramas.

Brendan Killian, like Sienna, also works in a photo-realistic manner, but less for a sense of drama and ambiguity than mood and substance. ...

Sienna and Killian are the standouts.

Charles Bonenti. 2002 Berkshires Week Williamsburg, MA

Bonenti, Charles. "Realism is in the eyes of the beholder" Berkshires Week, July 4, 2002, p. 23

2002

Six months later - Artists reflect on how their work has been affected by 9/11

PAMELA SIENNA, PAINTER. Sienna lives and works in East Boston. For seven years, she’s been working on a series of wrapped packages with images of fire or atomic explosions in the background. People now read her work differently. Her piece “Red Alert” (shown below) can be seen at the Arden Gallery in Boston.

Catherine Foster. 2002 The Boston Globe

Foster, Catherine. "Six months later" The Boston Sunday Globe, March 10, 2002, p. L10, one image

2002

This stunning collection of super realistic paintings is a real find this holiday season. Pamela Sienna has exhibited trompe l'oeil work before, and her skill in rendering objects with careful attention to details of texture, light and shadow is only growing. But what's unusual, for such an accomplished still life artist, is her willingness to allow mystery and imagination to remain such a large component of her finished work.

This is because what she paints is wrapped bundles. These items take on a special significance in our turbulent times; as clearly as we see them (and she renders every fold, every crease, down to the details of types of bindings used to tie up these vaguely shaped parcels), we have no idea what they really contain.

Sienna places her parcels on solid enough surfaces, sturdy grounds of darker color that either fades to black or form a horizon behind which loom ominous skies. Are those nuclear dust-clouds we see forming in the distance, or tell-tale smoke stacks from some polluting industry that's not nearly distant enough?

Her titles add to the sense of unease, every bit as suggestive and direct as her confident technique. "Mass Build Up" is a graduated stack of boxes, starting with a gold bundle (bound with an ivory shoelace), over an orange bundle (restrained by a black bootlace), over a red package (tied with a white strand of rope), over a messy white bundle (tied with shiny red ribbon). Red explosions illuminate this warm-colored pyramid; it's as if the bundles are symbolic attempts to restrain something that's already reached crisis level.

"Bound to Repeat" shows three upright packages, resembling pillars or ancient dolmans. One is purple, the second turquoise, the last olive green. A length of cord, ribbed and textured, snakes between these protective (but ultimately impotent) figures. Behind them, on a vast plain, nuclear fires glow as if from a power plant disaster, fires that will never be extinguished. For Sienna, the disaster has already happened.

Shawn Hill. 2001-2002 [artsMEDIA](#) Boston, MA
Hill, Shawn. "Part and Parcel at Arden Gallery" [artsMEDIA](#), Dec. 15, 2001- Feb.15, 2002, pp. 6, 7

2000

...Pamela Sienna's paintings are wrapped enigmas. Sienna layers vivid and contrasting colors, binds her objects with twine, then drops in a place card of fires and volcanic scenes. This is no atavistic still life.

L. J. McLean. 2000 [ARTS Editor](#) Boston, MA
McLean, L. J. "Brave New Palette" [ARTS Editor](#), May 2000 online

2000

Noted art critic/cultural historian John Berger wrote in his book *Ways of Seeing* that the oil painting is best understood as “a safe let into the wall, a safe in which the visible has been deposited.” Berger’s words are critically important to the understanding of the impressive body of work, entitled “Wrapped,” by Boston artist Pamela Sienna, now on view at Space 12 Gallery.

Space 12 Gallery has brought together a survey of Pamela Sienna’s current body of work, totaling some 20 oil paintings, most of which are oil on panel and typically around 11 inches by 14 inches. Sienna has been painting all her life. Growing up in an art-oriented family, she started early – her first work, at the age of twelve, was a still life.

Throughout her career as a painter, Sienna has engaged in still life painting on a regular basis. Sienna’s work shares similar concerns, both compositionally and thematically, with 17th century Dutch still life paintings. The Dutch still life, or *vanitas*, paintings focused on the temporality of human existence highlighted through sumptuous portraits of worldly excess. With “Wrapped,” Sienna pushes the *vanitas* theme resoundingly into the present.

Temporality as a situation contemplated by the thinkers and artists of the 17th century bears little relation to the 21st century understanding of the precarious nature of everyday existence. The majority of Pamela Sienna’s works in “Wrapped” contain one common element: the wrapped object. The second frequent element is the reference to the ominous; be it distant fires, the threads of lighting or ultimately the nuclear explosion. Typically, the titles of each work are modified (the telling afterthought). The importance of this wrapped element in Sienna’s work is both in how the viewer will be drawn into the work (color) and how they will be kept there (the unknowable ... the mysterious).

Pamela Sienna’s style has evolved to a level where her oil panels are saturated works of built-up color. No simple colors exist within Sienna’s picture plane; instead, combinations of reddish-oranges, bluish-greens or blue-blacks, to name just a few, predominate. The colors are consistently luminous. At times, the color contrasts can cause a visual break, the division between color fields so intense that the eye must temporarily find focus elsewhere.

Sienna’s colors are the key element that extend these images outwards into the viewer’s space. They are enticements...modes of seduction that prompt the viewer’s entry into the grand illusion which Sienna has presented. The works in “Wrapped” are a variety of square and rectangle planes...remember Berger here. Space 12 Gallery has allowed these works to spread out across otherwise blank white walls, providing essential space.

In *Wrapped (strapped)*, 1999-2000 (10” x 8”) Sienna demonstrates the meticulous attention to detail with which she approaches her still life subjects. *Wrapped (strapped)* follows

the presentation style that Sienna uses throughout the works in this show. A package is pushed close up to the picture plane, titled upwards as if to indicate that this bundle is an offering. A fine purple drapery is tightly strapped at both ends of the package...a decidedly forceful element within this work. The package is positioned against a brilliant blue field of color – read it as the sea if you like - that slides impossibly up towards a horizon line where a fire burns intensely, smoke trailing off in the wind.

The central wrapped objects in Sienna's paintings begin, as you gaze at them, to read like portraits. Every nuance – every fold of cloth, the stress of a strap against a wrapped object, and light and shadow – is carefully constructed to make these objects live and breathe within the painting. In contrast, the backdrops for these object-portraits range from the mystically restrained to the wildly fantastic.

The rendering of the various non-wrapped objects in Sienna's canvases – a torn photographic image of an inferno rests next to the purple wrapped object in *Wrapped (strapped)* – receive a similar amount of detailed attention to light and modeling as central wrapped objects. You almost reach out to touch the small photographic bit in *Wrapped (strapped)* before acknowledging that it is painted right onto the canvas. These *trompe l'oeil* elements are a frequent presence in Sienna's works, continuing her meditation on the importance of reality and the nature of illusionism in ultimately bringing us closer to it.

Clarity of vision allows the viewer of Pamela Sienna's paintings to focus on their beauty and in so doing become caught in their inherent irony. In *Wrapped (device)*, 1999, we admire a brilliant red pile of drapery, following every fold and crease as we attempt to discern what may lie underneath. Indeed, the work's title, *Wrapped (device)*, gives us a way in. As we note the rounded shape (a detonator?) we realize that what is so beautifully rendered may be the very instrument responsible for the glowing plumes of fire in the distance. That which is invisible to us, the device, and that which is visible, the reactive fire/explosion, constitute the heightened tension present in all of Sienna's works in "Wrapped."

Pamela Sienna refers to this tension in another sense. She describes the inherent "potential" she is exploring in her paintings. Drawing from a definition based in physics, Sienna brings the concept of potential (truth and energy) to the forefront of the viewer's experience of her works. In this exploration of potential, Sienna places herself squarely in the tradition of realist painters, constructing appearances that are "real" and simultaneously "unreal." This visual paradox effectively extends the narrative element out towards the viewer. The viewer suspects an elaborate story; they're given the clues and the power to continue the narrative for themselves.

In Pamela Sienna's images of mysterious wrapped objects against a host of ominous backdrops, the viewer is asked to surrender to the sublime contemplation of their contemporary moment by stepping outside it. Sienna's paintings work the "real," each canvas "a safe let into the wall," and the treasures inside slowly reveal what becomes the sublime truth: that how we perceive the world around us...those truths that we understand as fixed are not so stable after all.

Pamela Sienna only has to present the visage of human arrogance, the hydrogen bomb, to help us realize how fleeting our moment in time could be. Sienna's paintings are surprisingly without ego, the artist sees herself more as a vehicle for the image...an almost spiritual process of revelation. Being both generous and the consummate seductress, Sienna seeks a slow dance with the viewer and...chances are, you'll have a hard time saying no.

Mark Valentine. 2000 South End News Boston, MA

Valentine, Mark. "What's underneath the covers?" South End News, Boston, MA March 23, 2000, pp. 15, 20 (two images)

2000

Continuing in surrealism with the precision and religious feel of Salvador Dali are the five paintings of Pamela Sienna. Each painting shows an object loosely wrapped in fabric tied simply ... The object either seems to float or rest on a surface. In each painting fire is represented either as something in flames or as a photograph of fire tucked under the package. The paintings are done in very deep colors, with the fabric of the wrapping a drapery, as in religious art of the Renaissance.

Eve Rifkah. 2000 The Montachusett T&G Fitchburg, MA

Rifkah, Eve. "Fitchburg exhibit is contemporary dance of detail" The Montachusett T&G, March 15, 2000

2000

Some of the works ... convey an ominous or disquieting mood that prompt reflection on the disquieting elements in life. For example, there is something terrifying about Pamela Sienna's images of cloth-covered packages and fire. In her statement Sienna writes, "Potential truths are wrapped in folds and shadows, illuminated by fire, hidden in smoke, and suggested by fragments."

Andrienne Clark. 2000 Sentinel & Enterprise Fitchburg, MA

Clark, Andrienne. "New Talent spotlighted in Fitchburg art exhibit" Sentinel & Enterprise, March 9, 2000

2000

The Fitchburg Art Museum has mounted its fifth biennial survey of regional artists, “New England/New Talent.” Hundreds of artists applied, and 18 artists were chosen: each is represented by a handful of works.

Pamela Sienna’s vivid realist paintings of suspended packages wrapped in fabric and tied with twine over sharply colored, flat grounds are full of portent. Each one features the sizzle of fire - a lick of flame, an ember. What’s there to be unwrapped somehow causes the smoldering.

Cate McQuaid. 2000 The Boston Globe

McQuaid, Cate. "New England’s new talent in Fitchburg" The Boston Globe Feb. 26, 2000, pg F7

1999

Drawing on traditional paintings from the Netherlands which presented realistic and beautiful still-lives as contemplations on the temporality of life, Sienna builds upon this tradition by literally blowing it up.

In “Horizon: Smoke and Still Life” we see the complexity of a fiery drama at play in the artist’s mind as it unfolds on the canvas. The still-life here is in the foreground of the work. Bundled drapery with jagged ridges and valleys spread outwards with two solitary glazed pottery pieces on top. One of the ceramics is a similar off-white shade as the drapery; the other is a brilliant fiery orange which makes the connection with the true subject of this work.

Just as the drapery in the upper left corner of “Horizon: Smoke and Still Life” reminds us of a stage curtain drawn back to allow the audience to see the play, it also allows us to understand this work as pure drama. The curtain cannot hide the wall of flames and billowing cloud of purple/blue/black smoke that engulfs the canvas beyond the foreground’s still-life. Sienna’s built-up layering of color and the intensity of her palette is the key to her work’s vision of calamity.

Sienna’s imagery is ironically beautiful, for it is her explosions, nuclear or otherwise, that captivate us for their richness of color and sense of movement. Is the artist drawing us into admiring the bomb? It’s not just Caravaggio’s drapery that has inspired Sienna but also the theatricality that infuses his art. Sienna likened these still lifes to offerings to the gods before the final Armageddon. Whether they’re meant as humorous offerings or as profoundly disturbing ones, you will marvel at their play.

Mark Valentine. 1999 South End News Boston, MA

Valentine, Mark. "Still lifes, yet moving" South End News, Boston, MA, June 3, 1999, pp.11,17

1995

Many of Pamela Sienna's recent paintings depict nude figures sitting or standing in front of snap-shot-like images of nuclear explosions."

Sienna's preoccupation with [the instruments of] death is portrayed explicitly in the self-portrait *Clouded Past*. Here the artist 'vivisects' her truncated figure to expose her rib cage, within which there are no internal organs. In the background, bellowing smoke erupts from beneath the earth from what is presumably an underground nuclear test. As in the [Hindu] ... poem, the underground test is 'the shatterer of worlds' and the 'insides' of the artist are exposed to show that, perhaps like the earth in the painting, she has been hollowed out.

Bruce Baldwin. 1995 The Stony Brook Press, State University of New York
Baldwin, Bruce. "The Sexuality of Splitting the Atom" The Stony Brook Press, Stony Brook, NY, Feb. 6, 1995, p.13 and cover, three images

1993

There are memories here that you can't hope to share or unravel completely, but which pique interest nonetheless, simply because of the quality of the art. Pamela Sienna's *Staging Ground of Memory II* is as close as the show ['Fragile Power: Explorations of Memory' at Newton Arts Center] comes to textbook Surrealism, with its nude woman, seen from behind, a twisted stick echoing the line of her spine as she looks out at two distant views of the same landscape: one with an ominous column of smoke, the other overgrown by moss. The painting is at once completely clear and utterly unintelligible.

Christine Temin. 1993 The Boston Globe
Temin, Christine. "Memory is the Stuff of Art in Newton Show" The Boston Globe, Boston, MA Nov. 10, 1993

1993

Pamela Sienna's *Staging Ground of Memory II* deals symbolically with the disturbing effects of traumatic past events that are not available to conscious recollection. A naked figure with her back to the viewer looks out on a landscape. At the horizon, there is an explosion and dark clouds gather; something is wrong, but it is not clear what. The figure's back is bisected by a stick that runs the vertical length of the painting: for the artist, the stick is a symbol of strength, and strength is needed to face the troubling but identified events that confront the figure. This work alludes to potentially powerful nonconscious

influences of memory on emotional experience – an idea that was crucial to psychoanalytic thought and is now being investigated experimentally in cognitive science and neuroscience.

Daniel Schacter. 1993 Fragile Power: Explorations of Memory exhibition catalog
Schacter, Daniel. Newton Arts Center catalog, Newtonville, MA, p.12 -13 (one image) 1993

1993

In *Self Portrait #1*, 1993, Sienna stands surrounded by *trompe l'oeil* photographs of nuclear explosions ‘taped’ on the canvas. The *trompe l'oeil* is exquisite - I looked close to make sure it was paint. The portrait is a well worked blend of tones that believably stresses the illusions.

David Raskin. 1993 News and Views Stony Brook, NY
Raskin, David. "Arguing with Sienna's Self-Portraits" News and Views, Stony Brook, NY, Nov. 2, 1993, p7

1993

Pamela Sienna’s ‘Time Line’ of self-portraits manifest her consistent process of introspection over the years as well as her awareness of the world around her.”

“... her penetrating stare continues to follow the viewer around the gallery space implicitly wise and focused. Her position before the narrative backdrops is almost that of a journalist recounting events. There is an obvious connection between Sienna’s self-portraits and those of Frida Kahlo.

Bruce Baldwin. 1993 Stony Brook Statesman State University of New York
Baldwin, Bruce. "Pamela Sienna's 'Portraits of The Artist'" Stony Brook Statesman, Stony Brook, NY, Oct. 11, 1993, one image

1992

Pamela Sienna’s “Sky (Window)” is a small altar shape filled with a deep orange and blue dynamic sky. Her gray “Cloth Across the Wall” is a nice *trompe l'oeil* illusion, with a streaked wall below. But her figurative pieces are both more political and more vague. The two versions of “The Chasm Between What is Said and What is Done” show troubled, screaming or blindfolded people in the foreground with fires or trauma in the background. Yet the situation, and her criticism thereof, remains ambiguous.

Susan Wadsworth. 1992 The Hartford Advocate
Wadsworth, Susan. “Sixth Sense” The Hartford Advocate, Hartford, CT, April 16-22, 1992, p.16

1991

The stick as a basic symbol of strength surfaces again in a nearby painting by ... Pamela Sienna. *Staging Ground of Memory II* is an exquisitely painted realist image of a stick supporting the nude back of a female figure, who looks out at a dark green horizon disrupted by storms and bomb explosions.

Jude Schwendenwien. 1991 Art New England
Schwendenwien, Jude. "Artworks Gallery at Artplace" Art New England, Brighton, MA, Oct.-Nov.1991,p.29

1989

While few artists share the powerful vision of the juror [Janet Fish], there are nevertheless several noteworthy paintings on view. Pamela Sienna won honorable mention for her oil and collage piece *Anima: Iniquity*. A carefully rendered, starkly lit draped cloth hangs in the center of the picture. It acts as a false cover for horrific images from photos. Her excerpts of warfare and urban anger float in a turbulent mass of drips and stains. For this artist, the still-life element is an obstruction to more pressing social issues.

Jude Schwendenwien. 1989 Hartford Courant
•Schwendenwien, Jude. "Artists in New Haven Exhibit Take Innovative Approaches to Still Life." Hartford Courant, Hartford, CT, May 1989

1989

Pamela Sienna takes on the political anachronisms of still life in her collage *Anima: Iniquity*. The largest portion of the work is a well-realized painting of a cloth draped from a vertical surface. Arrayed around this central image are photographs and drawings of scenes of political and racial violence and upheaval - strikes, lynchings, bondage, and murder. The work makes a strong, memorable point about the relation between still life and life.

Dennis Fawcett. 1989 New Haven Register
•Fawcett, Dennis. "Still Lifes Breach Traditional Boundaries" New Haven Register, New Haven, CT, May 28,1989

1989

Unstill Politics. In other works, bold strokes of ideology are applied with equal aplomb. At first glance, Pamela Sienna's *Anima: Iniquity* appears to be the kind of well-crafted drapery study which all good art schools require of their students. On closer

inspection, various scenarios emerge around the edge of the canvas: an exploding nuclear power plant, a self-immolating Vietnamese monk, naked bodies strung upside down by the ankles, South African children standing next to an automobile in flames. That art school drapery study suddenly offers a multitude of readings. It is a shroud, a gag, a blindfold, or a stage curtain dropped like a euphemism in the polite theater of consensus politics.

Margaret Spillane. 1989 New Haven Independent

•Spillane, Margaret. "Energized Still Life at C.A.W." New Haven Independent, New Haven, CT, May 18, 1989

1988

... at the Queens Museum ... We get discus throwers wearing swastikas [Komar & Melamid's *Discobolus*], ... Apollo poised among missile warheads [Pamela Sienna's *Deus ex Machina*] ...

Ancient statuary is sent flying into the air or toppled to earth (in works by ... Pamela Sienna, Mark Tansey and others), undone by earthquakes, wars, infernal machinery and just plain human meanness.

Karin Lipson. 1988 Newsday New York, NY

•Lipson, Karin. "New Twists on Classical Images" Newsday, New York, NY, May 27, 1988

1988

The cosmic significance of Pamela Sienna's painting is initially reflected in its title, *Deus ex Machina* ... Sienna's translation of this dramatic event, integrat[es] classical and contemporary subjects ... A curtain, symbolic of the theatre, divides the painting into light and dark areas. Within the shadows, a mechanical network is fantastically combined with a dense web of painted and acrylic transferred photographic imagery, consisting of MX warhead missiles, a locomotive, dancers, and the Apollo from the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. This assault of visual stimuli is somewhat alleviated by rays of light. ... the sweeping scope and grand themes in the work [by Pamela Sienna and Mark Tansey] discussed above...

Barbara C. Matilsky. 1988 The Queens Museum catalog for The Classical Myth and Imagery in Contemporary Art, an exhibition that included these artists: Arman, Robert Colescott, Jim Dine, Janet Fish, Audrey Flack, Leon Golub, Sidney Goodman, Komar & Melamid, Carlo Maria Mariani, George Segal, Nancy Spero, and Mark Tansey.

•Matilsky, Dr. Barbara. Classical Myth and Imagery in Contemporary Art
Queens Museum Catalog, New York, NY, 1988, Pp. 25, 27-28, one image

1984

Pamela Sienna calls herself a diarist rather than a realist. Her figurative oil paintings are intimate scenes which cast the viewer as voyeur. Sienna ... paints her friends and herself. She calls her self portraits a “sparring match - to get close without inflicting serious damage to the illusion of one’s personality and the resiliency of the ego.”

Christine Temin. 1984 The Boston Globe

- Temin, Christine. "Critic's Tip" The Boston Globe, Boston, MA, May 10, 1984, one image

1983

Pamela Sienna’s full length portrait, *Document 28-'82, Half-Life*, deploys rapid and striking chromatic shifts that highlight the power with which she paints flesh. Comments in collage force the mystery of her subject, posed before a curtain and wielding the bronze arm of art with its sublimated and Delphic revelations.

Eugene Narrett. 1983 Art New England

- Narrett, Eugene. "City Hall Gallery-60 Artists" Art New England, Brighton, MA, April 1983

DOT • INDICATES that, PRIOR TO 1991, all records of exhibitions can be found under the name of Pamela Moynahan. In the excerpts, the name has been changed to Sienna for continuity.

