



Massimo Vitali's "Mont Blanc, 2004," in a show of his new work at the Bonni Benrubi gallery, through Jan. 28.

wood, and paint that looks as if a gallery wall had collapsed. The installation, which takes up most of the modest space, is titled "Comber," and it cites an 1840 sailing narrative as the first instance in which the word was used, to describe waves breaking off a beach in California. The nod to etymology is nice but not really carried through in the work, which serves, like much work in the trompe-l'œil Zeitgeist, more as a virtuoso special effect than a layered, meaningful gesture. Through Jan. 28. (Grimm/Rosenfeld, 530 W. 25th St. 212-352-2388.)

"THE MAGNUM ARCHIVE"

This sprawling, eccentrically organized exhibition of more than a hundred vintage photographs from the Magnum agency's vast archive provides a quick immersion in pop history, from the front page to the gossip column. Photographers like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Susan Meiselas, Gilles Peress, Robert Capa, Eve Arnold, and Philip Jones Griffiths sent back photos that captured the heat of the moment with a reporter's clarity and an artist's verve. In an installation that juxtaposes images of Martin Luther King, Marilyn Monroe, Yasir Arafat, and Pablo Picasso, it's difficult to focus on one topic, but look for Bruno Barbey's kinetic shots of the Paris street protests in 1968, made all the more immediate by recent events. Through Jan. 7. (Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

NATE LOWMAN

Richard Prince's junk-culture appropriations and clichéd joke paintings are recycled in Lowman's

canvases plastered with bumper stickers. A poster for an unknown kitsch gallery featuring a cowboy on horseback boldly evokes Prince's famed series of rephotographed Marlboro ads. Warhol is echoed in silk-screened paintings of buller holes. Even with retreats as blatant as these, Lowman's presentation doesn't feel stale. Perhaps it's the frank acknowledgment offered in a scrolling L.E.D. panel turned on its side, which reads "Imitation is the highest form of flattery." Or maybe it's his perspicacity in choosing bumper stickers printed with juicy, archetypal American aphorisms like "A leading cause of stress is reality," "E.S.P. Extra Sexual Person," or "I bet Jesus would have used His turn signals." Through Jan. 8. (Maccaroni, 45 Canal St. 212-431-4977.)

PETER PLAGENS

As one of the country's leading art critics, Plagens is well equipped to offer a breakdown of his kinship with other painters: to the primordial scratchings of Cy Twombly, the graffiti scrawls of Basquiat, or the slapstick goofy biomorphism of Carroll Dunham. His muted abstractions are wholly satisfying, however, independent of these comparisons. Hulking forms lurk like ghosts or phantoms in gray and brown and white fields, broken only by prisms of bright color, sometimes shaped like comic-book talk bubbles. The titles don't give much away, although they add some literary zing. One canvas is titled "The Painter Who Knew Better," which raises the question, Better than the critic? Through Jan. 3. (Nancy Hoffman, 429 West Broadway. 212-966-6676.)

"THE LAST GENERATION"

Google "The Last Generation," we are told, and you will find references to everything from obsolete software to A-bomb survivors and the Rap-

ture. The guest curator Max Henry has taken the catchall phrase for the title of his show, in which lowly analog mechanisms stand in for all-too-human feelings of dolefulness and boredom. Notable are Kota Ezawa's ashen animation of Taylor and Burton in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"—sort of like "The Family Guy" for vicious alcoholics—and a weird diptych by Laurent Montaron called "Somniloquie." A large C-print shows a woman asleep, with a microphone pointed at her head and a shirtless man lounging beside her; nearby, a staticky home-pressed record on a cheap phonograph purports to play back her dreams. Through Jan. 7. (Apex Art, 291 Church St. 212-431-5270.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

The company's performances this week are a study in contrasts, with works by Balanchine, the company director Peter Martins, and the resident choreographer, Christopher Wheeldon. Three programs (Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday night) combine Wheeldon's "Liturgy"—a dark pas de deux, with Arvo Pärt's "Fratres," which includes a series of complicated lifts—with a pair of Stravinsky ballets by Balanchine from the early sixties, "Momentum pro Gesualdo" and "Movements for Piano and Orchestra." The contrast between Wheeldon's tightly wound piece and the two Balanchine ballets, in which small, simple steps and pauses are punctuated by lyrical gestures, should be striking. Balanchine's "Allegro Brillante" (1956), a fast-paced, romantic work with music by Tchaikovsky, will also