

Broad Spectrum of Curatorial Vision On View

By Eric Ernst

In developing the series of exhibitions currently on display at Guild Hall in East Hampton, exhibition organizer Christina Mossaides Strassfeld has executed an entertaining curatorial sleight of hand, offering something for just about everybody. Featuring humor and angst and everything in between, the four separate exhibits illustrate Virginia Woolf's description of beauty as having "two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish," while also providing evidence of all the gray areas in between.

Occupying the Moran Gallery is one of those exhibits that proves that creative concept of whimsy need not always be bereft of darker, sometimes twisted, motivations. Entitled "The Ambiguous Toy," this show features the playful meanderings of 11 different artists whose conception of "toy" doesn't necessarily include overtones of exalting childlike innocence.

With its objects and images that are, by turns, slyly mischievous and intellectually pointed, the exhibition is successful for the sheer breadth and diversity of the works and the different levels on which they can be appreciated. As Leontius observed long ago: "a subject which would not bear raillery was suspicious; and a jest which would not bear a serious examination was certainly false wit."

Undoubtedly due to current events somewhere on the planet, perhaps the single most powerful work included is Robert Richenburg's "War Paint," consisting of a small potted plant with toy soldiers for branches. The piece is incredibly dark and, aside from any political editorializing one could ascribe to it, points out the simple and bizarre paradox of playthings meant to glorify the carnage of battle.

Also of particular note is the series of constructions by Rocco Liccardi fashioned from painted jig-saw puzzle pieces on canvas that create dynamic sensations of depth even as they totally fracture the surface of the picture plane. "Black Cloud" puzzle, acrylic on canvas, 2003) is arresting as much for the manner in which it displays the intensity of a black on black approach as it is for il-



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lustrating that artists other than Ad Reinhardt have the right to attempt the process.

Other artists exhibiting in this section include Irwin Perton, Elaine Grove, Laurence Hegarty, Helen Kutash, Christa Maiwald, Sheridan Sansegundo, Athos Zacharias, Lynne Heffner Ferrante, and Christine Najzzonek.

Meanwhile, in the Alice Baber Library/Leidy Gallery, this lighter side

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of the curatorial agenda is continued with an exhibit of the cartoons of the late Warren Whipple, from his popular syndicated strip entitled "There Oughta Be a Law." Indicative of the subtle wit and gentle humor of this local legend, the cartoons are still quite entertaining and, in some cases, as timely today as when they were originally published.

Traversing the creative cosmos to art's more serious side, the Spiga Gallery features a retrospective of the work of Gerson Lieber, an artist whose public approbation has never matched the respect and acclaim accorded him from within the art world itself. Illustrating his iconoclastic and adventurous approach, the paintings reflect his truly profound sense of vision as well as his mastery of surface composition and assertive use of painterly techniques.

Moving seamlessly from Surrealism and Cubism through Abstract Expressionism, the works share an inner vitality that is made more powerful by Mr. Lieber's sensitive yet insistent approach to structural organization.

Perhaps the only drawback to the exhibition is that it is placed in a gallery far too small to express the true visual impact of the work or to display a large enough body of work. Addressing the latter point, the museum has provided an excellent exhibition catalog including a complete retrospective along with a highly informative essay by Gail Levin, but, as edifying as the catalogue may be, I was left wishing I could see the real paintings instead.

Finally, in the Woodhouse Gallery, the museum is exhibiting recent works by Darius Yektai, winner of best in show at the 64th Annual Artist Members Exhibition at Guild Hall a couple of years back. Featur-

touches some chords that are a bit disturbing.

Featuring aspects of figuration that emphasize sinews, tendons, and raw musculature—the vinculum of the human body—the imagery is anything but restful. Emphasizing this organizing principle of energy is the artist's use of collaged objects such as flattened turpentine cans, used tubes of paint, and other detritus and autobiographical flotsam and jetsam from his studio floor. While this spurs a sense of cacophony through both visual and textural contrasts, there is also a kind of un-

derstated symphonic compositional approach that is surprisingly tender and offers an interesting contrast to some of the works' more aggressively discordant surface qualities.

This is especially apparent in his most recent paintings, which also seem to resolve the daily conundrum for representational artists of

what to paint on a given day. Faced with the issue of whether to paint a still life, a portrait, or a landscape, Mr. Yektai solves the problem by painting all three, layering and melding them together into one composition. The effect is actually quite engaging and creates a tableau in which the focus seems to constantly shift the viewer's attention from one corner of the canvas to the next without being labored or manipulative.

This shift of focus is accentuated by Mr. Yektai's more gentle painterly approach to nature, which seems to ameliorate some of the darker themes suggested by his occasionally tortured figuration. There are even a few flashes of humor, as in the work entitled "The Greatest Fish Story Ever Told," which has no fish apparent in the picture.

This is something of an exception, however, and, for the most part, these are not restful paintings to look at, nor, I suspect, did the artist intend them to be. They're tough, challenging, and entirely uncompromising.

All four exhibitions currently on display at Guild Hall continue through January 11, 2004.

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