

Opinion

Toys, Cartoons, and Paint Tubes

complementary new shows
at Guild Hall

BY ROBERT LONG

Three of Guild Hall's new shows — a one-man exhibit by Darius Yektai, a survey of Warren Whipple's and "The Ambiguous Toy," a show — complement each other well. A fourth exhibit looks good company, too, but because it's a retrospective show by Gerson Leiber, it requires separate consideration, and will be reviewed next week.

Anna Mossaides Strassfield, Guild Hall curator, picked 11 very different artists when she assembled "The Ambiguous Toy." Some of them are full-time artists; others are periodics — people who pick up a brush or a glue gun only when inclined to do so.

The show includes work that employs toy imagery in a variety of inventive ways. The painter Robert Richenburg sometimes used small figures — toy cars, for example — in his work for realism, symbolic and textural, and some are on view.

Richenburg also has found himself years making little objects out of parasols, pinwheels that respond to wind. They're graceful and fun to look at. He made them "just for the fun of it" one day while looking at them in a museum. "I made art," the artist has said.

Jeffrey Ferrante's crusty assemblage of multicolored little toy figures and mounted on wooden frames, aren't theatrical, but they are gentler in tone than the aggressively beautiful "constructions" that the artist Alfonso Ossorio is known for. It's impossible to think of Mr. Ossorio's work when you see Mr. Ferrante's. Nevertheless, it's a good show.

Ossorio is invoked outright by Rocco DiStefano, whose constructions incorporate models of cars, dolls, and toys into a seven-foot-high piece, "Homage to the Toy," covered with thousands of jigsaw puzzle pieces; you imagine that if you pull one out, the frame and gave it a good



Common objects are nearly swallowed up in the purposeful, energetic brushwork of Darius Yektai's "The Greatest Story Ever Told." The painting, above, is included in a solo show of Mr. Yektai's work at Guild Hall.

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Sheridan Sansegundo's five jumping jack figures are medieval jesters that hang on the wall like one-dimensional marionettes. Each has hinged limbs, and with a tug of a velvet pull they would, indeed, jump. Small landscapes are painted on their breastplates and knees — verdant, hilly expanses with conical evergreens, neatly plotted fields, and skies that are sometimes clear and sometimes stormy. Ms. Sansegundo has a great time playing the patterns of a jester's motley off against these little glimpses of landscape, and the figures begin to seem emblematic of certain kinds of weather and geography. And their playfulness has a darker side, for their beautiful faces are unsmiling, sometimes lighted from the side or from underneath; they seem a bit threatening, perhaps unhappy to be stuck up on the wall with tacks, trapped in their silly costumes.

Laurence Hegarty, a psychotherapist who also teaches at Parsons School of Design in Manhattan, is showing a little choo-choo train made of found materials whose engine is a cut-out black and white photo of Freud — rather, Montgomery Clift as Freud — on wheels. The cars behind it include a yellow piggy bank with a tin can jammed on its tail. I really liked this emotionally shaky piece.

"Family Relations" consists of four life-sized, flat metal figures — a mommy, daddy, and two children — that can be moved around. Each has alternate painted faces that can be attached with Velcro — happy, sad, etc. — and each has a pocket with a marker so that viewers can write imaginary dialogue on one or more figures.

The artist, Helen Kutash, says that this

you? Nonetheless it's an engaging piece and doesn't need to be explained.

There are fun creations, too, by Elaine Grove, Athos Zacharias, and Christine Najdzionek. Christa Mairwald's big, gorgeous color photos of little children in benign settings holding automatic rifles and hand grenades are beautifully made though they also seem obvious and sentimental. It's the kind of propagandistic art that everyone feels virtuous in praising but that tells you nothing you don't already know.

Once you've finished looking at the toy show, you can see a roomful of Whipples — Warren Whipples, that is — in Guild Hall's library. Mr. Whipple, Guild Hall's first director over 60 years ago, drew the cartoon strips "They'll Do It Every Time" and "There Oughta Be a Law." The writer of the latter was Frank Borth of Montauk. I remember seeing these strips in the *Journal-American*, I think it was, when I was a kid.

It's always interesting to see how an artist satisfies the demands presented by the little boxes that make a strip, and Ms. Strassfield has included examples of Mr. Whipple's pencil sketches alongside his ink drawings and the proofs of printed cartoons, which were about half the size of the originals. There are longer Sunday comics, too, in color: epics, compared to the daily episodes.

Mr. Whipple's Christmas cards, emphatically inked drawings of East Hampton landmarks such as Clinton Academy and St. Luke's Episcopal Church, may be the most vivid work here, though. The intricately cross-hatched, hard-edged shadows of trees on snow in several of the designs are particularly memorable.

Darius Yektai, who was given the Best in Show award at a Guild Hall members

tence to the paintings. Mr. Yektai said that he makes a practice of using the leftover pigment from painting into a shape of something, sometimes over an armature,

forms over time that he transforms into figures and abstract shapes. Sometimes he includes used paint tubes

too. The sculptures somewhat resemble the figures in Mr. Yektai's paintings, which are like fleshed-out sticks with their arms and legs flung out from their body, as if they were wrapped in bandages and splinted. The figures are in landscapes that are more abstract, with recognizable shapes slipping out here and there.

There's a lot of energy in the work. The pigment is built up in areas and the canvas is nearly white where, so there is a constant tension between thin and thick surface texture and representation. Mr. Yektai is a purposeful painter; there isn't a moment in any of these pieces that's a strength.

Because he resists visual cliché, the paintings have an edge to them. "The Greatest Fish Story Ever Told" simply rendered objects — a canoe, a chair, a paintbox, a figure — appear briefly, then are swallowed in an overall chaos of white and black.

Although the big painting has an attractive energy, I liked best the small self-portraits in whose murky, coffee-colored pigments I glimpse bits of a face, fugitive lights, way, way back in the past. The experience of looking at the paintings de Kooning made is like