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separate

REALITY

Paintings, Assemblages and Constructions by Nine Youngstown Area Artists

September 11 through October 23, 1993

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By James Pernotto

With the advent of the information revolution, eclecticism has become the predominant artistic expression of the late 20th century. If it is true that no man is an island, it is likewise true that all people are universally linked. All styles of art now occur simultaneously, so it is difficult to focus on a common theme or approach. Therefore, in putting together this exhibition for the Riffe Gallery I have attempted to choose the work of Youngstown area artists whose only common denominator is that they have continued to work ardently in spite of the fickle whims of fashion or notoriety.

The exhibition title, "A Separate Reality," is taken from a book by Carlos Castenada about the teachings of the Yaqui Indian Don Juan and the warrior's search for enlightenment. Each of the artists in the exhibition is a psychic warrior of sorts. Their battleground is the studio and the foes are themselves. For the most part, they are all mid-career artists who share a common commitment and a dedication to what they do. Mid-career is a term that brings with it connotations of character and depth of experience, which means finally a humility in gain and an acceptance of loss. "What does not kill me makes me stronger," the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said.

The 1980s were given up to a generation in surrender. The decade will be known as the era of junk bonds, real estate speculation and an art market where form followed fashion.

In contrast, the artists in this exhibition were trained in visual and aesthetic concepts, have cultivated traditional skills and are prolific readers. They devour prose, poetry, science and mythology.

Their knowledge of the world is largely universal, like the word university, where most of them were exposed to anthropology, sociology and the like. Their acquired knowledge, skill and experience enable them to operate with art's most precise scalpel, the metaphor.

Except for the intimate assemblages of Karen Bizzarri and the frenetic constructions of James Lucas, this exhibition celebrates pure painting. Clyde Singer, the purest painter, received a Governor's Award for the Arts in Ohio in 1993. For more than 50 years Singer has been an immovable force in Youngstown art. As a student of Kenneth Hayes Miller, Singer exhibited in the 1930s with leading social realists like Reginald Marsh and Thomas Hart Benton at the Whitney Museum and in several Carnegie international exhibitions. Most Youngstown artists have had to react to the indelible impression that Singer has stamped on the area.

Michael Green has continued much of Singer's figurative and narrative tradition, but the color, the light and the social perspective have changed; so has the dream perspective by which he formulates images. And there is the music. Green's paintings

are audible. Viewers are moved by the lyric ritual that is creating space.

Tazim Jaffer employs narrative and figurative traditions to explore myth and ritual. Jaffer is of Indian heritage but was raised in Africa and educated in England. She emphasizes cultural diversity to produce tactile images with a universality that transcends place.

Time, place and story line also are important to Joseph Anthony Salvatore, but those qualities are not always immediately discernable in his work. His images and events, usually taken from scriptures, are supernaturally charged. Like the poetry and prints of William Blake, Salvatore's paintings are visions that illustrate what Alduous Huxley described as jeweled landscapes in "Doors of Perception."

Most surprising have been the highly abstracted and powerful landscapes of Steve Zordich. Painted with tar and oils, these physically tactile vistas are metaphors that would startle Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and James Joyce. There is a surreal quality that invites viewers to stand at the edge of the abyss, yet to gaze into it with confidence.

On both the cosmic and the biological level, where Russ Maddick does battle, the primacy of human scale is lost. He constructs his canvases to create surfaces that go beyond the usual rectangular format. On those surfaces Maddick slashes, parries and cuts with gestural marks.

James Lucas constructs his works, and often deconstructs them, in a different way. His studio and his works are one and the same. Pieces are built, torn apart, assembled and destroyed like some dance of Shiva, the Hindu god of both creation and destruction. His work often hangs on a wall like some jerry-rigged tower of Babel gone berserk.

But if an anthropological dig were to unearth the true Babel, the work of Karen Bizzarri might be discovered at the site. Combining clay, paint and found objects, her intimate artifacts often convey a spiritual, ritual presence. They possess the power of tribal fetishes that often are encrusted with earth, bone, blood, urine and food. They have names like "Drain Man," "Emerging Black Sheep" and "Moon River."

At the other end of the spectrum is Lawrence Greco's "Spectrum," a work that is hyper-logical. It is thought out, measured, worked out on calculator and logged-in, even though it takes months to complete a painting. His work is stripped bare and shares an affinity with cyberpunk and the new physics. The intense hues, density and imposing surfaces make us feel as if we have entered a strange loop.

Darwin discovered that in a situation of limited interaction, evolution produces hybrids or mutants. In Australia, that process created the kangaroo, platypus and the black swan. If Youngstown were an island it would be named Galapagos. That is not to say that Youngstown artists have fur, beaks or webbed feet; not physically anyway, but maybe aesthetically. That is good. The Youngstown attitude is to be an individual, whatever that means or whatever form it takes. Just as local politicians and athletes are unique, so are the artists.

James Pernotto is curator of prints at the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio. A painter, he teaches art at Youngstown State University. He holds a BFA from Ohio State University and an MA from the University of Wisconsin. Pernotto organized this exhibition in partnership with the Ohio Arts Council.

ARTISTS

and works in the exhibition

Karen Bizzarri

Auto Relic
clay
1992
5 x 3 x 2 inches

Autumn
clay
1992
6 x 4 x 3 inches

Caution
clay
1992
6 x 2 x 2 inches

Drain Man
clay
1991
5 x 3 x 2 inches

Emerging Blacksheep
clay
1992
5 x 3 x 2 inches

The Keep
clay
1991
2 x 5 x 2 inches

Moon River
clay
1992
5 x 3 x 2 inches

Red Angle
clay
1992
6 x 4 x 3 inches

Still Life with Bottle Cap
and Staple
clay
1991
5 x 3 x 2 inches

Untitled
clay
1991
5 x 3 x 2 inches

Lawrence Greco

Eunice
oil on canvas
1990
48 x 24 inches

Random Overlap
oil on canvas
1993
48 x 24 inches

Spectrum
oil on canvas
1990
48 x 14 inches

Valerian Drama
oil on canvas
1991
48 x 48 inches

Vortex
oil on canvas
1993
40 x 30 inches

Michael L. Green, Sr.

Bird and Miles
oil on canvas
1985
48 x 54 inches

Griot
oil on canvas
1990
50 x 38 inches

Impressions:
Alienation Blues
oil on canvas
1991
72 x 60 inches

Lester Young
oil on canvas
1989
57 x 42 inches

These Foolish Things
oil on canvas
1990
38 x 50 inches

Tazim Jaffer

Bagicha
oil and collage on
canvas
1984
48 x 60 inches

Kaeti Kam
oil on canvas
1992
60 x 48 inches

Shamiana
oil on canvas
1992
60 x 48

War
oil on canvas
1991
48 x 60 inches

James Lucas

Alexander's Fractal
wood
1992
42 x 38 x 30 inches