

Point of View,
Collecting Art: L.A. p. 3

Yura Adams,
Performance: S.F. p. 4

Burns Photographs,
Seattle p. 15

Art Law p. 16

ARTWEEK

EXHIBITIONS

BAY AREA ROUNDUP

San Mateo / Sylvie Roder

Once a year, the San Mateo County Arts Council (SMCAC) organizes a juried roundup of the art being produced in all nine Bay Area counties. This is a large constituency, and the council copes by using a mad, modified salon formula which seems to work very well under the circumstances. Bay Arts '82, at the SMCAC gallery, is the third of these exhibits. The selecting juror — this year, George Neubert — is always an unimpeachable authority. But he is the only one who has to produce any ID. Everyone else stands an equal chance, regardless of accreditations — only the works are being judged on their personal merit.

It certainly isn't the easy way out, but presumably this blend of impartial, informed judgment and subjective, esthetic instinct has determined the ninety choices drawn from some five hundred painting, drawing and sculpture entries which poured in. Nothing could be more democratic, or more daunting. Not because these are solemn proceedings but because, predictably, we are faced with a vast clamor of personalities at various stages of maturation, each represented by just one or two works. There's only one way to withstand this egalitarian, jumbled onslaught of sensibilities, and eventually thread your way through it: yield and merge, as you do on the freeway.

Neubert offered one taut lecture where he postulated, with Socratic wisdom, that all of us must frame our own questions and answers, since each must ultimately become the sole judge. Save for his talk, Bay Arts '82 is an exercise in nonverbal communication. This is certainly faithful to the nature of visual art

(all the rest being literature), but it may not be the most encouraging approach for SMCAC's widespread, mixed public.

So be it. The works alone must enlighten us. Stare and blink as I might, in some of them I missed the grain of truth that each is supposed to contain. This disappointment is especially keen among the trendier pieces in both sculpture and painting. Among instances where the works simply do not say to me what they must have said to the juror who just as attentively singled them out are, here and there, a facile mimicry of Morris Louis, an undigestible painterliness, a primly minimal piece which seems more uncommunicative than even that genre requires, and some stilted, uninspiring geometric abstractions. But the show is designed as an overview, a sort of regional survey, and perhaps some works were included for the sake of illustrating the enduring influences and diverse interests which make up the local scene. A no-holds-barred, California-cuisine brand of eclecticism is one overriding flavor in this sampler.

On the other hand, the pleasures of the exhibit are equally keen. Some of the works fairly leap out, humming with a vitality and authenticity which are not always correlated to the artist's experience — or lack of it — that you can read between the lines. An example is Varis's inexpert but earnest black and white oil riverscape, hung next to Westelin's watercolor of a very comparable scene. The latter is clearly more adept, but not more gutsy or convincing. The crowning example of untutored, spontaneous, uncensored cri-de-coeur painting is Abraham's *Wedding at Lover's Point*. This comes as close to *art brut* as to *art naïf*, the kind that can never be learned, or unlearned. How to deal with such art without sounding patronizing? I would simply remark that the swift, unguarded poetry of this canvas is one of the high points and one of the humbling experiences of Bay Arts '82.

A very different order of ingenueness animates Haycock's *Power Towers w/ Mustard*. This is an economy-class triptych wherein the artist, with graffiti-enhanced ebullience, conducts a "triad" with his doubting self and his mutinous panels about the riddles of undertaking (and concluding) a work, at the same time attempting a broadcast appeal to the heavens. With each panel, the hue (and cry) becomes more intense, as does the static. The whole thing is executed with all the brio and none of the obnoxiousness of a *Saturday Night Live* skit. I find its visual punch and goofy attitude equally delightful.

Various portraits and self-portraits also trigger speculation. Canney's confident oil *Self-portrait with Goldfish* is meticulously realistic, scrupulously polished, and rather impassive against a highly decorative, gilt and crimson background. Strelhoff's *Like a Lady*, with much looser description and, in fact, more hesitant handling, conveys far more of the sitter and/or painter's aura: a hoydenish impudence which cancels the title, and a contagious pleasure in the act of painting. Kirksey's slick and slightly sullen watercolor, *Pausing for Pleasure*, sets down an aggressive kind



Bruce Erman, "497," paint on paper, 26-1/2" x 10", at the San Mateo County Arts Council Gallery.

of photorealist glamour which is very different from Canney's. Each of these suggests a specific temperament; each sparks a moment of recognition; and each embodies a distinct notion of painting.

Sculpture, while outnumbered, reflects the same multiplicity of approaches and styles. I have refrained from trend-spotting and influence-naming, but clearly the California clay movement continues to activate sculpture: witness Kruse's *Echo* which combines abstract form with humble-folk coloration and motif, or Lowe's more half-hearted *Piece of the Rock*. Miesner's *Camille* is a disciplined yet dynamic wood construction whose lower, unpainted portion seems derived from Brancusi, while the high-gloss painted upper section recalls both Robert Hudson and Ken Price. Strict geometric balance and careful proportion manage to resolve all this into harmony. Lechner's gray alabaster *Torso*, with its translucent, well-honed contours and graceful poise, is so flawlessly pretty that only a grouch would ask for more. But for tension and a more durable sort of elegance, you might want to turn to Waters's walnut and bronze *Connections*.

I've saved the best for last, and for this we must return to the painters. There are five cash awards and two honorable mentions in the show. None went to Harry Clewans, but there must be satisfaction for him in having three works displayed — two acrylic paintings and an ink/watercolor, all as vivid and undecipherable as those dreams we sometimes half-remember on awakening and can never quite interpret, nor quite lay to rest. They just haunt us, and we may even prefer it that way. Such is the atmosphere of Clewans's *Before the Interrogation*, with its dark suffused red breaking clean just before it engulfs a shadowy, agitated and indistinct incident encaged at the right-hand edge. The second, untitled, painting is a variation, confirming the recurrent-dream quality of this work. Here the dark blue paint area is less angry but encroaches farther, leaving only a narrow ink drawing cornered at the bottom — cornered because it shows the angle of a brick courtyard, cornered because the artist has "pooled back" one of the tips of the sketched wall. Now take away the overemphasis and approximation of words, substitute the artist's effacement, his accuracy of vision — and we may have done his work justice. □



Eugenia Tusquets, "Aimez-vous Mondrian?" oil, 23" x 37-1/2", at the San Mateo County Arts Council Gallery. Photo: Kathleen M. Podolsky.



YOUNHEE PAIK: HERE, 1982, lithograph, 22" x 30", at the Bridge Gallery, San Francisco.

Diametrics of static and kinetic movement, positive and negative space and the real and surreal are source material with which Younhee Paik works in an exhibition currently at the Bridge Gallery. She presents her perceptions as a series of lithographs and oil paintings titled *Here to There*.