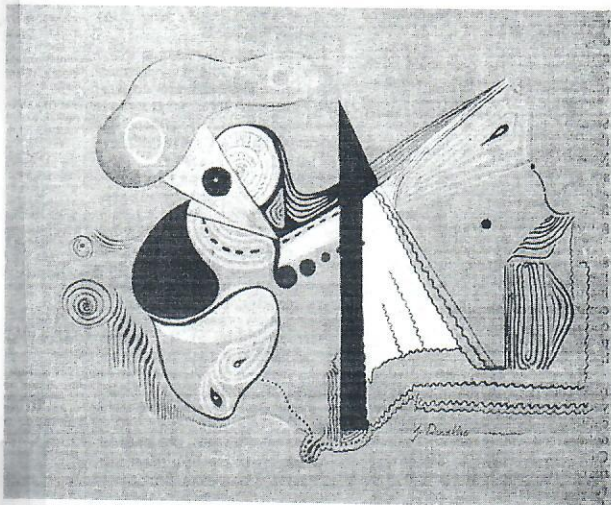


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

ART REVIEW

How Rutgers Women's Collection Grows

Recent acquisitions from the National Association of Women Artists, on view at the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum: "Martial Music No. 5" by Anita Weschler, left; "Child" by Helen Beling, above, and "Self" by Janet Steckler Dreskin.



By WILLIAM ZIMMER

NEW BRUNSWICK

THE National Association of Women Artists at Rutgers: Recent Acquisitions 1999-2002" includes over 50 new acquisitions by members of the organization, which was founded in 1889, in part because women were barred from showing their work at the National Academy of Design. Several well-known artists are members, but much of the pleasure of looking at the show comes from discovering someone unknown.

Much of the art is recent, but a number of older objects remind viewers that the association has a long history.

The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum is an avid collector of collections, and this reputation must have played a part in the decision in 1984 by the National Association of Women Artists to give its permanent collection to Rutgers.

The collection continues to grow, with new work donated by members or their friends and families.

Near the entrance to the show, viewers are met by several small sculptures. Two by Helen Beling from the early 1940's are imposing figurative works: a blocky but still winsome little girl, "Child," made of mahogany, and "Ethiopian," a head inspired by African masks made of plaster painted black that resembles ebony.

Figures compacted in bunches were the

obvious specialty of Anita Weschler. In the painted plaster "Martial Music No. 5: Drafted" (1936), soldiers are in lock step, but in 1945 Weschler broke the regular rhythm with "A Time to Speak," in which a family is reading the book of Ecclesiastes aloud.

A small pelican carved from gray stone by Margo Hammerschlag rounds out the group of weighty sculptures.

A perennial theme of American art is the rise of the modern city. Artists have always been eager to make compositions that include tall buildings and suspension bridges. In this show are "City Street," a lithograph from 1940 by Riva Helfond; "The People and the Bridge" (1956) by Dorothy Dehner, an etching from 1941 whose subject is the Brooklyn Bridge, and an untitled cityscape, a watercolor from 1955, by Lilly Gelman.

One of the first notes of modernism is sounded by Blanche Lazzari in a 1924 graphic drawing that is a rather lyrical interpretation of Cubism.

Other work that reveals artists trying to be of their time is the strange composition by Janet Steckler Dreskin, "Self." It was done in 1948 and reflects a dual interest in Surrealism and psychoanalysis, which were both rather novel subjects at the time.

Reflecting the 1950's and the dominance of Abstract Expressionism is Anna Walinska's rolling "The Earth Bears Witness" (1955).

The room holding most of the contemporary work is dominated by two sweeping mural-size paintings. "The Refinery"

employing stark silhouette for contrast as she paints other aspects of the refinery in full daylight. Her work is unpopulated, but that is more than made up for by the rambunctious "Life and Art in the Studio" (1988) by Emily Barnett, which is something of an allegory. It is unclear exactly who the artist in the painting is; no one is actively working. Art is brought very close to domestic life, but amid the interruptions and distractions of friends and presumably members of the artist's family, a nude model holds a standing pose.

Some of the contemporary work has a deliberately primitive look. Made of rough wood, "Native Flower" (1999) by Erin S. Johnson is a simple figure decorated with what look like odds and ends that might be found at a flea market.

"Paranoia" (1998) by Ann C. Rosebrooks, is an intentionally simplistic depiction of the mental state. The head of a man in the center of a long horizontal painting surrounded by eyes. Another rather literal depiction of what might be an internal state is "Invisible Women" (2000), by Bette Alexan-

der. Standing figures are partially effaced by a pervasive yellow ground. A head with wide eyes, something a child might draw, is all that's in Zelda Yarmuk's small oil pastel, "A Bad Spell" (1998).

New technological media are also represented. Sandra Bermudez's "Sandrita" (2000) is a C-print of a large color photograph. It is a very pale work; most of the composition is a depicted desert, but near the top are ambiguous figures who are so abstracted that they don't look like people. Whatever is going on resembles action in a movie, an impression that is strengthened by the wide-screen look of the image.

The florid "Cupid and Psyche in the Garden" (1996), a computer graphic by Lynne Kroll, is intriguing because it is an up-to-date treatment of a very old theme.

"The National Association of Women Artists at Rutgers: Recent Acquisitions," Zimmerli Art Museum, Through Nov. 7. Information: (732) 932-7237 or www.zimmerli-museum.rutgers.edu.