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GALLERIES

## On outer Cape, funky portraits tempt and tease

The Boston Globe

By Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent | August 5, 2005

PROVINCETOWN -- The art season is unrelenting here, with galleries often open seven days a week and shows turning over every two weeks or so. You could come to the outer Cape and hold your own intensive art-appreciation course.

One place to start is in Wellfleet, where CherryStone Gallery has mounted a show of funky, fabulous portraits by Robert Beauchamp, the figural expressionist who died in 1995. Beauchamp started out in the 1950s as an abstract expressionist, but he said he found that format too esoteric and within a few years was painting people and objects. Yet his muscular brushwork, his freedom of gesture, and the exuberance with which he handled paint remained true to the New York School where he got his start.

The straight-on portraits at CherryStone date to the 1980s and 1990s. They embody the same tension between comedy and tragedy that his work had always been known for. Every one of these subjects looks beat up and pulpy, but the joy in Beauchamp's tones and his paint application prevent any from appearing morose.

"Young Man With Dog" has a stern, pink-faced fellow standing in a field of high grass -- the brightness of the green grass and the blue sky alone will dizzy you. He clasps a panting, bug-eyed pup to his chest, a comic foil to the man's austere, forbidding expression.

Beauchamp spackled on skin tone in a rainbow of colors, then used broad gestures to outline and define. "Red Grooms With Red Triangle" is a portrait of the artist with a red nose, shoulders hunched up, his shirt a pink-and-green patchwork. His face is made up of strong geometric forms and filled in with lush dollops of paint. It's at once clownish and passionate. These paintings emanate the playfulness and ease of a master.

In CherryStone's second gallery, David Loeffler Smith is an apt companion to Beauchamp, and of the same generation. His palette is more muted, his format smaller, his paint more mixed and less out-of-the-tube. But he also works in figurative abstraction, and with it he builds space and forms that draw you into the picture (Beauchamp's work doesn't lure you in; it's more about surface).

Smith's paintings often refer to ancient Greek and biblical stories, but they stand up as ageless. "Inside the Trojan Horse/Troop Ship" refers both to Odysseus's strategy to sneak an army into Troy and to Smith's own experience in the military. He shows us bundled, sleeping soldiers pressed into one another, each a different color -- quiet, but glowing. There's a sense of making do, and of camaraderie in the face of hardship. Yet this is also abstraction: forms and colors activate the canvas, and, despite all the slumber, Smith's depiction vibrates with motion.

Child's play

The great New York photographer Helen Levitt has black-and-white prints up at Larry Collins Fine Art. Most of them date to the 1940s, and show her signature documentary style, depicting children at play in the city. Each one of them bubbles with energy. In one untitled piece, a crowd of kids gathers at a curb, picking up the shards of a broken mirror. Two boys hold the mirror's empty frame; another, on a tricycle, sits behind it.

Levitt is a master at capturing children -- their focus or lack thereof; their immersion in whatever they're up to; their lack of self-consciousness. Another print shows boys in winter coats clustered in pairs, waltzing on the sidewalk, bumping into one another, at once intent on their purpose and

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laughing at themselves.

#### Humble beauty

The Schoolhouse Galleries always has many small shows going on at once. Currently there are some gems. The wonderful South African painter Paul Stopforth has work there inspired by time he spent on Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned. He found bits of things there and offers them up as reliquaries, drawing them in charcoal and gouache over a painted surface. He imbues the humblest items with significance, as in "Monument," a huge safety pin against a ground of grainy color.

Thomas Nozkowski's abstract works on paper dance fleet-footed between intention and spontaneity; forms and patterns arise out of burbling washes of color.

Tony Mendoza shoots color photos of flowers from the ground up; they tower and shine eerily, often on the verge of death -- as in "Zinnias in November," gray and dry against a cornflower blue sky.

Amy Arbus shoots theater artists in costume and makeup out on the streets; their sheer theatricality is disconcerting in ordinary settings in these black-and-white photos. Morgan Cohen's color images close in on the beautiful passages we miss every day, like light glinting on a shower door. And Jennifer Amadeo-Holl's small paintings set forms -- sometimes readable, sometimes purely abstract -- against glowing skies and the suggestion of landscape. These works tease, drawing you into detail that resonates, then pushing you away with their unsettling context. ■

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