

Signature Artists Transcend Theme At Noyes Museum

Talent Rises in 'Beneath the Surface'

By PAT JOHNSON

I'm not a fan of "themed" art shows where artists are given a preconceived notion of what they should churn out for a particular time and place. It reminds me of the fire prevention poster contests in elementary school: Create a poster in red and black that will keep fire bugs from burning down Bambi's home. Invariably the results were 23 posters of flames and running Bambi, although the class's technical artist would throw in a fire truck and a Dalmatian for relief.

But audiences relate to themes, as they relate to schools of art. It's a gateway into the gallery scene, easier than going in cold turkey and possibly standing clueless in front of an artist's burst of personal creative language – a language the artist has been cultivating for years without you.

At least the title "Beneath the Surface" was vague enough to allow for the various artists under the protective umbrella of the Noyes Museum of Art's signature artist category to find something to say and fill the lower gallery with interesting work.

Artists who didn't feel the need to delve into the murky business of subliminal messages could take the theme literally; those who were inclined could delve delightfully

into their psyche. Then there were the artists who just plain ignored the theme. Artists are rebellious types at heart.

The abstract artists, of course, took the subliminal road. Abstract art is about the battle between the blank canvas and the artist's skill at transforming it into something meaningful that other people will want to look at.

Jean Hutter's "Deep Synergy," a symphony of sublime colors and suggestive shapes, is perfectly balanced with just a touch of calligraphy to keep it interesting. (If you have trouble with abstract art, think of it as crafting a successful visual dinner with a touch of this, a slice of that, an exotic spice).

Sheila Grabarsky's "Understanding Underwater" gives us a more intense color palette. Grabarsky is equally masterful at creating a visual feast. I've never interviewed Hutter, but I have Grabarsky, and she's made a lifetime of courageously facing the empty canvas armed with brush and color and finding sense and beauty in the encounter. It takes guts, like writing free verse with paint.

Surrealism was an art movement in the 1930s that came to fruition after Freud made so much fuss about the subconscious. Surrealist artists such as Salvadore Dali and Rene

Magritte made their dreams the stuff of art.

Val Dyshlov continues working that rich vein with "Puppet Show" from his Day-dream Series. Only Dyshlov knows the story behind the puppet master, a lizard and two blasé women that are captured in a prism; a blend of cubism and shattered-glass. Dyshlov is from Serbia and perhaps – like the animated folklore movies of the Japanese master Hayao Miyazaki – they have cultural significance beyond their wild beauty.

When viewing Tom Werner's works "Tree Creatures" and "Bird Hunting," the historic works of Joan Miro and Marc Chagall come to mind. Werner uses the same method, translating waking ideas into visual maps.

In "Tree Creatures," birds and people share a peaceful existence in a potato-brown landscape. In "Bird Hunting," people who live in tree hollows ignore the frenzied flight of birds being hunted.

Lou Story has a bit of the trickster in him. His painting "Psychic Apparatus" makes child's play of the theme. Using high-luster colors and wood-formed letters, he spells out Super Ego, Id, me, I, sex and hunger. It's fun to find them in the riot of color.

Photographer Amy Evans lets rain and fog color her landscapes. "Collective

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Memory #102," of an old building in rain, is an iconic image (like tombstones) that many beginning photographers hover around, but Evans has transcended the trivial; her work is truly haunting.

And speaking of haunting, what's to be said of Frank Kallop's tour de "farce," "Dead Painter"? In the drawing room-style of the great Dutch masters, Kallop created an almost life size (self?) portrait of a dead painter clutching a palette. Heart attack? Stroke? Hunger? Taking the "Beneath the Surface" theme to the max, its melodrama is surprisingly funny.

Ditto to Chuck Law's "Quicker," a painting based on the ditty "Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker." Law gives us an underwater scene of skull and crossbones with a liquor bottle. (Now we're getting into the flaming woods with Bambi.)

Artists who eschewed the theme still retained their dignity. Miklos Sebek's "Origin," a cast-marble, womb-like standing sculpture, is a beautiful thing. It draws lookers like moths to a flame.

Matt Burton's three ceramic sculptures, "Cataraction," "Geldeihen" and "Overlie," are all influenced by shell forms and beach flotsam and based on his proximity to Long Beach Island. His work comes from his environment;

it's not imposed.

Likewise, Debrah Jospe's meticulous drawings are as organic to her personality as granola. Like a brilliant magpie, Jospe gathers twigs, shells and bits of naturally occurring designs, poses them, draws them and presents them like theater. They are on stage as "Twists of Fate" and "Vastly Deep."

Other gems in the show include "Jonah and the Whale" by decoy and wood carver David Rhodes; it's wacky and whimsical.

The surface of Steve Kuzma's "Conch" has been scrubbed and finessed into a haze of luminous color.

Ellen Gavin's "Yard Sale" is just a terrific small painting of Americana. A red underpainting that peeks through brush strokes makes the colors jump.

Rhoda Yanow's illustrative pastel paintings of dancers are masterful. "Dressing Room" captures 14 dancers in a room; 10 are images in mirrors. "Black Stockings" uses the mirrors in the dance studio as compositional elements, adding a minimalist sensibility to a highly realistic style.

All the artists included in the Noyes' "Signature Artist" salon are well on their way to fame.

So, dear reader, please recognize that beneath the surface of my composition, which breathes a faux-contempt for the themed show, lurk numerous compliments and looming respect for the artists who participated in "Beneath the Surface," and the Noyes Museum for putting

it on.

"Beneath the Surface: Signature Artist Exhibition" continues through Oct. 5 at the Noyes Museum of Art in Oceanville. An artists' reception is planned for Sept. 12 from 5 to 8 p.m. ✦
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