

9-21-1989

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View masters

Four for fall

by Frances Middendorf

THE NEWSPAPER, SECTION TWO, SEPTEMBER 21, 1989

Trance formations build glass sculptures and voice." A saying from a contemporary sage? No. These are the titles of four current exhibits. *Trance Formations* is a series of oil paintings by William Warren at the Lenore Gray Gallery (through October 3); *Build* is a multimedia event at AS220 by Neil Salley and Kathy Kissik (through September); *Glass Sculpture* by Sara Young and James Watkins is at Gallery One (through September 24); and *Voice* is a show of scrolls, tablets and paintings by Brian Salzberg at Square One Gallery (through September 23). The artists all play with the idea of decay giving birth to revival. At a time of hazardous waters, toxic skies, muddy friendship values and not enough dirt for the landfills, it is no surprise that Joseph Campbell's book *The Power of Myth* has had a surge of popularity. Two of the artists made reference to the book and Campbell's proposed solution: to fix nature by the worship of it. Ah, Pantheism: that spiritual respect for the physical, the sensual and the visual.

The artists of *Build* are young, prodigious students with plugged-in energy. Kissik and Salley are like vacuum cleaners, unprejudiced in what they ingest. What is made of the source material is impressive and fearless. Kissik's black-and-white photographs incorporate tar, roofing paper, collage, polyurethane, double-exposure, laser printouts, Xeroxes, toners and drawing in ink and charcoal. The frame, mounting and image combine to form flattened sculpture. Variations on the idea of "building" include such subjects as apple crates, tools, aerial perspectives in industrial sites and portraits of boyfriend Neil's bare backside.

Kissik's sensitivity to harsh lighting, her active surface tamperings and the balance of large spaces with enigmatic forms make for phenomenal images. She attributes their readability to a commercial art background; "graphic design really stresses communicating with other people," Kissik said. Yet she is not held back by rules or buffeted by outside judgment. Her work engages the viewer without wondering who will be engaged. Whether one is looking at a por-

trait of an older woman or a brick wall, Kissik's photographs seem fresh.

Neil Salley's video piece is syncopated

onto three screens to the synthesized music of George Tanquay. "The process of washing out preconceptions and then

building up anew in a different light is not a bad thing," Salley said. Like an invisible anchorman, Salley uses his triptych of images to tell, destroy, and then retell a story. Two seven-minute loops and a four-minute piece of videotape flash on each TV screen. The tape plays over and over, but will run more than two hours without showing the same arrangement twice.

Some parts were initially filmed on a Super-8 camera and then futzed with. Short, scratched sequences of wood being drilled, water dripping off a bit of barbed wire, hammers, vices, nails being washed and an hourglass are interspersed examples. Between the film are taped interviews where Salley asked various subjects for advice. "There are no magic buttons, there are no magic buttons," echoes the voice of Armand LaMontagne, the realist wood carver. A cross section of folks, including AS220 director Umberto Crenca, also contribute adages. The collective effort of pictorial metaphor, personality parade and music can be likened to a pilot radio for the labor gods.

Brian Salzberg's work is on display at Square One Gallery on Dodge Street on Block Island. Salzberg invented his own alphabet, which looks like a cross between Sanskrit, Cuneiform and Persian. He wrote assorted forms on eggs, dollar bills, stones and toilet paper, as well as canvas. Salzberg is intrigued with communicating in a general sense by drawing one's attention to an individual vehicle of communication — handwriting.

An able journalist himself, Salzberg and four others publish a biweekly newspaper on the Island, *The Works*. He has also made a number of artist's books. A small letterpressed and Xeroxed pamphlet accompanies the exhibit; lettershapes festoon the small pages.

The key to *Voices'* scrolls, tablets and paintings is a Moses stone which looks like it should house the Ten Commandments; entitled "Divine Inspiration," it also has the code of Salzberg. "The message of the Ten Commandments was God's message and the writing was supposed to be God's writing," Salzberg said. "The mystical was unleashed

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through the individual which was Moses, of course. I hope that the people who come to see the show will think about tapping into a higher form of communicating by finding their own inner voice."

The mind and hand work together in the making of small symbols in an effort to correspond with other people. Salzberg refers to Joseph Campbell when he talks of expressing himself with minute indecipherable marks; one language could also make way for a peaceful and non-particled world.

Trance Formations are awake "dreamscapes." Williams Warren, like Salzberg, refers to Campbell, but takes the ideas of "myths" more literally. Meaning and imagery are woven together by painting icons like masks, temples, wings, batmen and businessmen.

Beginning with a heap of magazines, Warren cuts and pastes a collage from fragments of photographs. The end

product will trigger a surrealist conglomerate of related ideas. Warren then paints from the collages, emphasizing and editing with color and texture. The themes are concerned with modern-day threats: too much driving, yuppiedom, pollution, animal killing and death.

The most understated of the current exhibits which evokes by suggestion is the glass sculpture of Sara Young and James Watkins at Gallery One. Watkins' cast glass bottle ruins are rough-hewn and resemble Arctic ice drifts. Minimal and reductive, he stretches a form by setting up rhythms, repetitions and themes. Young complements Watkins' work and is further challenged by not having a solo form to play off of. She has collected rusted watering can heads, saw blades and assorted junk, which is blended into the work with her hand-blown and cast glass. Simplicity and clarity ring so strong that it would be blasphemy to muddy them with wordy descriptions. This glass show is an example of how one can say infinitely more with less. □