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Alternative arts abound at AS 220

AS 220 (for Alternative Space 220) is a real artists' hangout in the middle of Providence. The building at 71 Richmond St. houses artists' studios, a modest recording studio and a cafe-cum-performance space which also doubles as a gallery.

Founder Bert Crenca characterizes it as an unjuried but not unmanaged space, which takes on all comers and presents all acts—alternating the well-known and experienced artist with the neophyte—both on its stage and on its walls.

The goal of the people who run the space is to offer patrons new and original works, which are often in process. The programs—posted daily on the chalkboard front door and in the monthly flier—range from art films and legitimate live theater to progressive jazz and folk/ethnic music groups. With a four-dollar cover charge for most events, there is a lot of bang for the buck. Performers return, stimulated by the responsive audiences that frequent the space.

The artists featured on the walls this month offer works which depart from the safer fare of the commercial gallery world, and which are notable for the vigor and singularity of their visions.

The young painter Alexandre Itin from Conn. has created a striking series of three-dimensional portraits in a Cubist vein. Picasso and Braque constructed guitars, tabletops and teacups out of cardboard in the early 20th century. In their painted portraits, they fractured the surfaces of heads and bodies and reassembled them into intricate systems of faceted planes.

Itin has performed similar feats of dissection and reconstruction in his works, but he paints them with the boldness and dash of more modern artists like Willem de Kooning, and with the wit and whimsy of caricaturists like Red Grooms or Saul Steinberg.

In *But I Love You*, a standing man constructed of wooden two-by-fours, cardboard and sheetrock, has a bald, Daddy Warbucks head, a pulsing heart protruding from his chest and outstretched arms. His chest and head are broken into brightly colored planes made of boxes glued on top of each other. Itin's strong drawing skills and his reckless and exciting paint application hold a work together which might break apart visually in less capable hands.

In *Grandpa sits and speaks of his war*, Itin has combined figure and interior space. A man sits sideways at a table, with his legs

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crossed, knees jack-knifed under him. His legs are planes, built of overlapping boxes whose flat surfaces project toward the viewer, the feet clad in clunky black oxfords. His head is a landscape of stepped and tilted planes, the mouth an open book (literally—a paperback with a text which reads like *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, the lips folded back).

Many paintings have shoes affixed to their surfaces, doubling as noses on huge heads. Itin feels that a person's shoes are character-revealing and never lie. Before he began this portrait series, he completed a number of landscapes with shoes, among them a work titled

TienAnMen Square, with 60 to 80 pairs of shoes glued to its surface.

The works are lively, powerful and inexpensive. Itin is sending a group of works to the Theater West-End Gallery in Zurich, Switzerland, in late September.

Very different in form and medium, but also employing discarded scrap materials with great freshness of vision, are the works of Gramma Ida (Antonelli) displayed in the hall of AS 220. A true folk artist, Gramma Ida was a long-time resident of North Olney Street in Johnston before her death in 1987 at age 86. She started drawing at the age of 70 on the advice of a friend who said, "When you have worries, draw a picture."

Her 58 small works in ball-point pen, colored pencil and color marker fairly glow off the wall. The lace-like picture, some monochromatic and some in vivid hues, depict Utopian gardens with running brooks, doves and birdbaths, park benches and church cupolas. She repeats this vocabulary of forms over and over again in her works, with subtle variations.

In the best of these works, there is a fine visual tension between the strong unifying designs and the fill-ins—the textured backgrounds or spaces between the objects. Colored sequins and fake pearls have been sewn onto many of the postcard-sized pictures, further enriching and complicating the surfaces.

The works are at once child-like and visually sophisticated. They seem to come from a realm and an aesthetic that is part lace—with its intricate patterns of threads and spaces, part stained-glass window, part doily or place mat. □



Gramma Ida, a true folk artist takes everyday materials and, by the force of a singular vision, transforms them into a unique and unified whole.