

12-17-1993

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The Providence Journal

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Recommended Citation

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Local art scene is humming for the holidays

As Christmas approaches, local galleries and museums continue to be busy. In Warwick, the Warwick Art Museum has put together an exhibit and sale of artist-made toys called "Serious Fun." Organized by Providence artist Patucci Shehan, the show features everything from a fanciful sailing ship made out of an ironing board to a group of stuffed toys based on characters from "Steven," Providence's very own underground comic strip.

Other highlights include Tony DiBona's welded metal trucks, which look like ideal toys for children who like to break things, and the whimsical dolls and puppets designed by Sara Hemenway and Tim and Diana Flowers. For more adult tastes, the show offers Fran Poisson's surrealist doll fantasies (think of it as Dali meets dolly) and some wonderful folk art sculptures by Providence artists Mark Taber and Susan Clausen.

Through Jan. 14 at the Warwick Art Museum, 3259 Post Rd., Kentish Armory Building in Warwick. Hours are Tues.-Fri., 11-4 and Sat., noon-4.

In Providence, the new AS220 gallery on Empire Street is hosting a two-person show featuring drawings by Larry Davis and

ART WRAPUP

By Bill Van Siclen

paintings and assemblages by Fish Bundy. Davis's work comes in two basic flavors — a series of swirling free-form abstractions and a group of edgy, expressionistic portraits. Both show off the artist's distinctive drawing style, in which heavy strokes of black are used to define shapes and textures.

Bundy's work, meanwhile, mixes the sacred and the profane in ways that seem designed to shock delicate sensibilities. A series of mixed media pieces called "Bang Bang Girls: My Sainthood, Ecstasy and Boredom," for example, features pictures trussed-up women taken from bondage magazines. Other works illustrate a variety of lurid activities, including hanging and self-mutilation. There's something a bit too calculated about all this, as though Bundy was more interested in offending her viewers than enlightening them. But there's also something genuinely affecting — a prickly kind of lapsed Romanticism that comes through most clearly in the paintings, with their cramped spaces and nervous, chicken-

scrawled figures.

Through Jan. 1 at AS220, 115 Empire St. in Providence. Hours are Mon.-Fri., 11-5.

Finally, some bad news. The Rhode Island art community lost one of its most beloved and respected members last week, when Providence sculptor Constance Leslie died after a long bout with cancer. The 44-year-old artist was probably best known for her brightly colored ceramic columns, which mixed motifs borrowed from Greek and Roman architecture with more fanciful elements such as fish, fruit and geometric forms. At her studio on Hope Street, Leslie also produced a variety of smaller, less expensive ceramic pieces which were carried by art and craft galleries across the country.

But Leslie was more than just a gifted sculptor with a special talent for the ceramics. She was also part of a remarkable group of artists, including illustrator David Macaulay, glassmaker Dale Chihuly, comedian Martin Mull and pop star David Byrne, who emerged from the Rhode Island School of Design in the late 1960s and early '70s. Not only did these artists put Providence on the map as an center for contemporary art, but their success laid the

foundations for today's lively contemporary art scene.

As the head of her eponymous company, Constance Leslie Studios, Leslie showed that was possible to live outside the art capitals of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles and still develop a national and international reputation. In many ways this legacy was just as important as her sculptural work, which can be found in public and private collections around the world. Among her many local commissions are murals for the Providence YMCA on Broad Street and the Wellesley College swimming pool in Wellesley, Mass. She also designed ceramic tiles and murals for several Providence restaurants, including Leo's and 3 Steeple St.

Leslie is survived by her husband Warren Kingsley Barker, a boat builder and designer in Westport, Mass., and two children, Lydia Poole Barker and William Leslie Barker. A memorial service will be held tomorrow at 2 p.m. in the Central Congregational Church, 296 Angell St. in Providence. Friends of the artist have also established a trust fund for her children. Contributions can be made out to the Constance Leslie Children's Trust and sent to P.O. Box 96, Attamsville, R.I. 02801.