4-1-1989

Object art? the collectors are coming

The Newspaper

Fran

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/as220_root

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/as220_root/2065

This is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ RIC. It has been accepted for inclusion in AS220 Digital Archive by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ RIC. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@ric.edu.
Object art?
The collectors are coming

by Fran Middendorf

T was the night before the collectors were coming. Twenty-five Providence craftspeople weren't lying around waiting; they were all in their studios putting the last touches on two or three pieces that are to be shown at AS220 (71 Richmond Street, Providence) tonight (Thursday through Sunday). The fancy folk will be out for the guest's arrival and we locals are invited to attend as well.

On Saturday, April 22, all was quiet in an old mill complex on Brainard Avenue. The brick towers were still, the parking lot was empty, one could hear water running under the courtyard, and even the Dunkin' Donuts across the street was deserted. Up four flights of co sky stairs and in a back room, Did Acraman hunched over a work table. She was sanding three brooches, her stries in the Rhode Island Objects exhibit, Suydam, a gifted jewelry designer, won National Endowment for the Arts last year and has had numerous shows, a feature in Metalsilk magazine, and many accolades. Yet Saturday, she had been up since 5 a.m., sanding and gold-lea​ding with determined intensity.

Leaving behind her earlier emphasis on taliomaniic imagery, Suydam is relying less on an associated concept and more on the forms themselves these exhibit catalogues as a portfolio booklet is trying to get the attention of Susan Clausen.

Clausen and her boyfriend, Umberto Crenca, run AS220, a non-profit, alterna​tive studio, gallery and performance space which is usually a casual place. Rhode Island Objects is probably the most prestigious show the space has ever hosted. It will only be three days long, but the preparations are getting every­one frantic.

Upstairs, Clausen and Crenca share a studio with two skyscrapers and Victorian office mouldings and fixtures. The front hall is Clausen’s and the closest to the door is Clausen’s, Boxes, jammed glass drawvers, drip-pens, sanders and tools clutter up the space. On the walls and side-able risks are Clausen’s found-object assemblages, all but one unfinished. Cement, copper, a casted lead dog, a cut-out photograph of an exploding nebula, a battery-operated alarm buzzer and rusty steel balls wrapped in the lining of a fur coat make up a piece called 'Cathouse’. The work is wry, mechanically clever (like a science project one always dreamed of thinking up) and ribald. ‘Cathouse’ is the one interactive sculpture in the show—one can push down the lever on the top to activate the siren. Still, Clausen is nervous and her mood is accentuated by her short blond hair cut to stick straight up.

A grumpy voice calls from downstairs: "Susan, Jesus." But that’s just one of the problems that Clausen has to solve before Thursday. "That rock from Utah was hard to drill," she says, pointing to a work with a dummy bullet, a lead duck and a prism balanced on top. Because she used a variety of materials, the craft and skill come into play drawing the work to both, drill, glue and wood ele­ments that are not customarily put together. It is not immediately apparent how much work goes into each piece. "I can’t say the fact the objects are so fantast­ic…there are a lot of different ways to interpret [the assemblages]," Clausen says. "People bring something to each object. So why all the fuss over the bunch of collectors? And who are the collectors anyway? Well, it’s a secret. Every year, this particular group travels the country searching for talent. Like gallery owners, the collectors usually descend on their old standbys, visiting studios and looking for new talent. This year, for example, Clau­sen and Crenca share a studio in New York, where many artists in their works are fertility symbols. "The kind of fertility where you have what you need," she says.

These influences surface in works, like "Headless Angel," as narrative and poetic as an opera and mythic as the recurring symbols she uses. Another, untitled piece floats an eye on the round world of infinity. Mother glass looks like water pouring out of the eye’s boat shape and into a curve meant to be the seas. The bird’s shape is the eye again, and the coil on the edge of the bottom piece suggests that the shape will continue to repeat itself over a larger area.

Personal memories play a large role in the glass works of Dan Clayman. Inspired by an exhibit of temples at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and recently propelled by "grief energy," because his mother recently passed away, Clayman’s cast and gold-lea​ded glass stems are abstracted iron and pocketbooks as well. A simple, associat­ed image in glass seems to exist in inner light.

Megan Downer’s rugs are aerial views. She’s a bit disturbed that, in this show, the tufted wool pieces will not be seen from above. Fine art is defined here, since her concepts are far-reaching and intelligent, her work personal, psychologically beguiling and coherent, even political and humorous.

If you buy an “elephant trunk” table from Dennis Ury, the proceeds will go to save a few elephants from poachers. The legs of the table are bleached mahogany and look enough like tusks to get protests from people who have seen them in galleries. That’s what gave Ury the idea to give 16 percent of his profits to Project Elephant.

There are many artists to mention all of them. And it’s quite possible that there will be a few surprises at the opening; maybe the secret of who these col­lectors are will be out of the bag.