

Thursday May 24, 2007

## Show's Pieces Also Fit Together

By Eric Ernst

The dramatic contrasts in the manner in which two separate spaces approach the structure and tone of staging a group exhibition are on clear display this week in shows at the Spanierman Gallery in East Hampton and the Silas Marder Gallery in Bridgehampton.

At the Spanierman Gallery, a small tightly cohesive group of artists is showing pieces that embody a certain aesthetic similarity that is constantly establishing entertaining dialogues between the works. Interestingly, though, this shared aesthetic exists quite independently of any overt similarities in styles or techniques on the part of the exhibited artists.

Instead, curator Arlene Bujese seems to have chosen specific individuals whose works function as interlocking pieces of a larger whole. Highlighted by a use of disparate concepts by the various artists that offer variant approaches to composition in their use of space, color, and texture, the works are tied together by one element: their dependence on highly gestural brush strokes. This imparts, throughout the exhibition, a calligraphic quality that is continually inviting the viewer to attempt to read the pictures as much as look at them, the result of which is both challenging and engaging.

This literary quality is perhaps most pronounced in the works by Stephanie Brody-Lederman, not least because she not only paints her titles into the field of the pieces themselves, she has also recently taken to incising and scratching them into the frames as well. This creates a kind of echo effect as one views the canvases, underscoring to an even greater extent the hand of the artist in specifically steering the viewer toward her particular stories or narratives.

These are invariably whimsical in tone, yet nevertheless are also a bit mysterious in their ambiguities when matched to Ms. Brody-Lederman's use of tone and surface qualities.

Pricilla Heine, by contrast, offers no literary hints within the works, yet their narrative elements are overtly emphasized through her use of figuration, matched with an almost frenetic use of abstract compositional structure. This is particularly notable in "Squeaky Burroughs Asleep" (oil on linen, 2006) in which the central figure is established less through a literal interpretation than one based on a combination of colors and brush strokes that defines form as a gestural rather than physical structure. Carol Hunt's works, on the other hand, are more overtly calligraphic, using sweeping and energetic brush strokes to conjure both ancient pictographs and oriental sumi-e characters. This effect is further enhanced by the artist's confident use of negative space, which accentuates and amplifies the rhythms created by the slashes of paint that pulsate across and into the works' planar dimensions.



Carol Hunt's "Morning Music" is on view at the Spanierman Gallery in East Hampton.



Josh Dayton's "Cut Back" is also on view at the Spanierman Gallery.

An overt oriental effect and use of calligraphic imagery is also apparent in works by Josh Dayton, who, in these paintings, establishes a dramatic interrelationship between form and color that is uniformly dynamic. Seamlessly weaving painted surfaces with collaged paper, Mr. Dayton is able to conjure a sense of depth in which the background colors always seem to float just out of reach.

There is a similar effect at work in the paintings by both David Geiser and Alexander Russo, except that, rather than establishing a sense of distance through color and form, in these paintings both artists use contrasts in texture and tonal variations in light to achieve the same ends.

For Mr. Geiser, these contrasts create an assertive interplay that establishes a highly organic and energetic ambiance that, in works such as "Gold Bowl" (oil, varnish, leaf, and mixed media on board, 2006), are balanced and controlled by the use of geometric imagery, which also injects the presence of the artist's hand.

In Mr. Russo's works, while there is a similar organic quality to the images and rhythms he creates, the artist appears to be much more cognizant of the structure of nature in his use of flowing colors and rhythmically repetitive abstract brush strokes. This is of particular note in works such as "Forest Sunset" (acrylic on paper), in which the cacophonous cadences that sweep horizontally to and fro across the surface of the painting are anchored by a single vertical shaft that gently appears from deep within the work itself.

"Six East End Artists" continues at the Spanierman Gallery in East Hampton through June 9.