



"Kristen and Jonathan," by Manon Cleary.

Artful Contrasts

By Andrea Cohen

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Unlike many of their predecessors who made reputations a decade or more ago, the best of today's young Washington artists work in a range of styles and disdain dogma.

This is quite clear in the works by Kristen Moeller, Manon Cleary and Allen Appel now in the first-floor corridor of the Corecoran Gallery of Art. For contrast, paintings by Gene Davis, Tom Downing, Paul Reed and other Color School artists—who in the 1960s finally put Washington on the map as an important art center—are at the adjoining Washington Gallery.

These Color School paintings are first of all very outspoken. Huge in size and intense in color, they are also somewhat cerebral and done according to variations on a successful formula. By contrast, the work of Moeller, Cleary, Appel and other younger artists, is lower key and much quieter; it is smaller, softer in color, more personal and intuitive, even magical in spirit.

Most magical of all are 26-year-old Kristen Moeller's pastel and color pencil drawings of fantastic, dreamlike worlds in which the only humans are detached-looking women. Usually they are alone. In a typical picture, a tree grows out of a huge conch, its branches reaching to the moon and stars, encased in a hole in the sky the shape of a bird.

In other Moeller drawings there are herds of zebras, an antelope or two, a person in beast's drag, a chaise lounge made of sea animals and peacock feathers growing out of a vase. Art nouveau-like patterns of flowers, leaves and vines unify Moeller's work, covering almost every exposed surface.

Her forte is her whimsical imagination, which sometimes outstrips her skill, as evident in "The Card Players," her only picture in this show which intends to portray a real-life situation.

The figures look like wooden dolls into which life hasn't yet been breathed.

By contrast, Manon Cleary's portrait drawings in pencil are nothing if not alive and lifelike. In drawing, she is unsurpassed in Washington, and if a certain harshness marred Cleary's less mature work, it has now vanished.

Her new portraits are very soft, yet precise renderings of people caught in characteristic but fleeting moments. There is the portrait of Christina, whose job is guiding people on walking trips through the Himalayas. She is shown as a strong, but not a hard, young woman. Next to her is Dorothy Polan, who looks like an older, less vigorous version of Christina.

Cleary draws largely by erasing: pulling out light areas and white lines much as one does in charcoal drawing. She seems to coax the figures toward the off-white paper surface, which often acts as a haze, and sometimes as a peephole through which they are seen. Another reason Cleary's figures seem slightly distant is that she works from photographs, and says she often gets more involved with them than with the way live subjects look. She does portraits on commission through the Pyramid Gallery.

In spirit, Allen Appel's nostalgic, soft-colored collages are in harmony with Manon Cleary's drawings, just as Cleary's are in tune with Moeller's. In part this is, of course, a matter of temperament. All three are non-shouters and private people who feel things strongly but choose to talk, and make art about them, with restraint. Their influence on each other has been inevitable, since all three have studios in the same apartment building.

Appel is known primarily as a photographer and this is his first all-collage exhibit. These pictures verge on conceptual art and are

tougher than his earlier work. They are about horrifying things, such as atom bombing and Charlie Starkweather, who was executed in the electric chair. But because the subjects are presented in a visually attractive way, combining lettering, and found objects, one is seduced by them before being repelled.

For example, the picture on which the words "Charlie Starkweather" are stenciled also shows two comfortable and harmless looking women, perhaps female relatives of the killer, as well as an old picture postcard, possibly of his high school.

The collages are all done on lineup paper, not only because it is easy to work on, but because Appel, iconoclast that he is, couldn't resist when he saw "High Art" printed on each sheet.

Many of the scraps of things he uses were found haphazardly, like the crumpled and uncharacteristic news photograph of JFK, next to which Appel has stenciled "JFK Shot Through the Head." His work is also at the Max Protetch Gallery.

The Corecoran, also has 52 energetic and vibrant watercolors by Hans Hoffmann, the German refugee painter who as a teacher in New York and Provincetown exerted a seminal influence on American art of the '40s and '50s. The exhibit runs through July 15.

Also on display, through June 30, are huge and high-keyed, hard-edged abstract paintings by British artists Michael Tuzack and Trevor Bell, who have worked and taught in the United States.

British sculptor Tim Scott's very large abstract pieces, which have a creeping-creature quality and are constructed of rectangular colored sheets fastened to aluminum tubing, will be at the Corecoran through July 7.

Brassai's photographs of the people of Paris, including such artists as Picasso and Braque, will be at the Corecoran through July 15.