

February 22, 1975

## Galleries: Compelling Works, a White Parody

By Meryle Secret

The two white rats are very sleek and every hair on their plump backs stands up like a quill. They move across the floor with a slithery skittishness and then stop, fixing you with eyes of red stone. Every detail of their appearance quivers; yet there is something larger than life about them that convinces you that they are a hallucination.

This work by Manon Cleary is one of many in a group of unusual quality assembled by Pyramid Galleries, 2121 P St. NW, which is showing the work of 12 women artists, and also a group of Dial paintings done a dozen years ago by Tom Downing.

Almost all of these works merit particular attention for what they have to give and what they demand. This is not a show of "women's art" as such. It demonstrates that variety of interests to be expected from a range of temperaments, and few specifically "feminine" concerns.

"Wall" is another compelling work. Rebecca Davenport, at 32, is a painter of note who specializes in sharp-focus studies of middle Americans; a Diane Arbus of the brush. This, however, is a still-life: a wall to end all walls; nine feet tall and every detail of it painted with photographic clarity.

Here is brick, fallen away to reveal its pathetic underpinnings, the way Davenport will paint human decay. Over the surface float tatters and shreds of white curtain, diminishing to a few filmy threads, loosely blowing against the brick. It is a portrait of decay, but so lovingly observed, and lit with such a high, bright light, that it feels like the Monday morning of the world.

Jo Ellen Vanouwerkerk paints in smudged grays that look like blurred photographs, a girl in a wheel chair wiping her nose, surrounded by the

flotsam of her life; the mood is somewhere between nostalgia and melancholy.

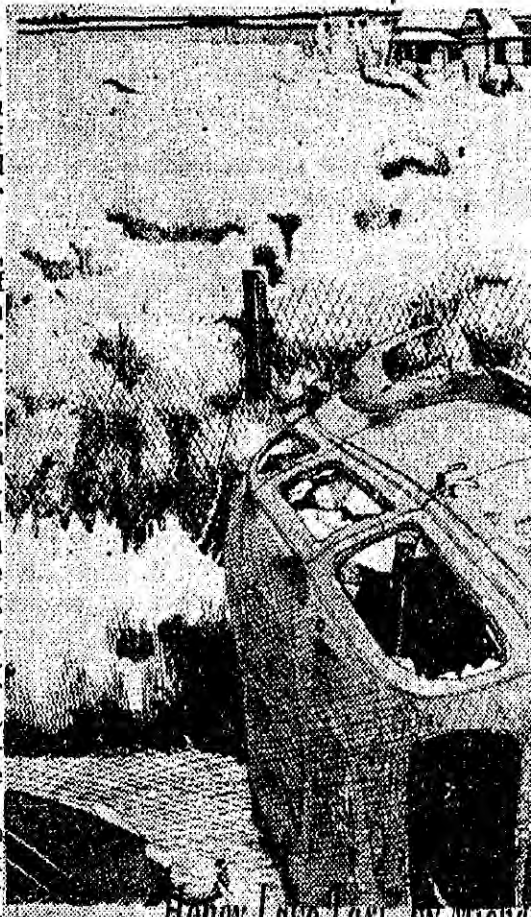
There are tapestries by Shari Urquhart, appropriately "Doctor Rug" and "X-Rated," since it is only when you stand back from the joyous jumble of Pop-Art colors, metallic threads and circus spangles, that you discover some distinctly erotic tableaux.

There is the work of Patricia Quinn, who makes use of the naive style of some veiled and sinister comments on male archetypes; and a lovely, circular work by Sheila Isham, soft colors shifting and refocusing.

Finally there are the Dial paintings of Tom Downing, circles revolving in a rigid sequence on unprimed canvas. These are elegant experiments with the plays of color against color, warm against cool, light against dark, made when the Washington Color Painting School was in full flood. Downing surrounds many of his circles with a faint border of the same color in a lighter shade. The resulting optical effect makes the circles blur, from a distance, although they never do manage to take off into space.

I have been trying and failing, to like Downing's work for years. I think of his subtle plays of color as if they were a closely related group of tones on a piano keyboard being struck in a single chord. The resulting sound will be delightful, or of limited interest, depending on your point of view.

Jim Carroll III, who is showing a group of his latest works at the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, has invented a room. A flat wall, occasion against a pole, which is also in the corner, takes up two-thirds of the same room. From the tiny shadow the canvas; its shallow floor is tiled in pole casts, it is seen to be a palm tree. bright colors. Into this room he has brought a little girl dressed in white, straight out of a 19th-century photo album. He seats her on an airport-modern bench beside an ashtray and there



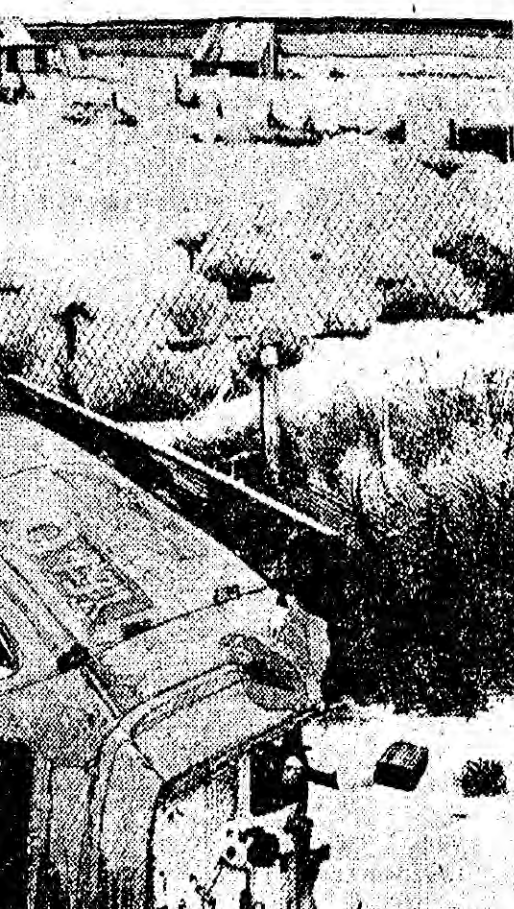
she sits, the charming incongruity.

In another painting of the same room a woman in a 1940s fake-leopard coat strides confidently toward us, beside a grand piano. Another woman in a Hedy Lamarr bathing suit leans against a pole, which is also in the same room. From the tiny shadow the canvas; it is seen to be a palm tree. A woman with her hair in a snood, otherwise undressed, reads a newspaper with absorption; an ad in it proclaims, "Fantastic."

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Galleries: Compelling Works, a White Parody (cont.)



more-knockout shade of green. He would have approved of Hardart, the new gallery at 1407 15th St. NW (open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, 12 to 6 p.m.). It is a high-ceilinged, turn-of-the-century house which has been painted white within an inch of its life: ceiling, walls, floors; one expects the eyebrows of the owners to be the same color.

This parody of the all-white room is the perfect foil for the elliptical, orange-pink-red canvases of Wil Brunner. Brunner likes to make rubbings from Indian rock paintings on lined and squared paper, so he made a painting of the rubbing, the squared paper and the comment he had written below it.

Brunner found a crumpled envelope and thought it looked like a Braque bird, so he painted that. He is in fact seeing everything in visual terms, things that to most of us wouldn't look much like art at all. In transferring them to canvas he forces a reevaluation of these humble objects and, by implication, of everything else visible.

In the work of Tom Dineen, now showing at the Athenaeum, 201 Prince St., Alexandria, there is a dynamic tension between the formal and random. His group of 16 works in acrylic and pastels are abstracts that look as if they may have begun life as nude studies, interiors, or the silhouettes of roofs. Odd objects, almost-familiar shapes, are spilled across the canvas in a seemingly random sequence. Yet the inner order, the tension and balance of these works, is also apparent.

"It all remains part of the working period—when the body takes its share you feel the pressure above and below—it's all quite unplanned/yet the act of completion arrives with cowbells," he writes. Though this mist of words, this almost perverse ambiguity, a kind

of meaning gets across. The same thing is happening in his paintings, which are perhaps less profound than a bravura statement of a developing talent.

Janos Enyedi, a senior at the Corcoran School of Art, has a show of models for works of sculpture, drawings and prints at the Wolfe Street Gallery, 420 S. Washington St., Alexandria. Enyedi imagines vast minimalist steel sculptures painted black, but this work is less interesting than the sketches that accompany them and a group of woodblock prints on gray rice paper in rainbow colors, of suns and squiggly shapes.

From the graduations of color, it seems that Enyedi has made collages of thin layers of tissue or stamped the rice paper with rings of gold, making slight indentations. He has done neither of these things but the *trompe l'oeil* quality of these prints remains.

In "Honey Lake Taxie" Michael Moore, one of a group of California printmakers now at Gallery 4, 110 S. Pitt St., Alexandria, composes a bright yellow, abandoned car on its side in the foreground of a bleak landscape. It is a compelling image. Elizabeth Quandt studies doors opening onto doors, a glimpse of stale backgrounds; the suffocation of an enclosed life. Wesley Chamberlin examines a piece of ice floating on top of a drink and, by pursuing its clefts and crevices with color, as though they were veins in a rock, heightens the image out of the ordinary. There are also the etchings of Stan Washburn, in particular "Adam Naming the Animals." While a bored Eve sprawls in a pearl-shell chair under the Tree of Knowledge, Adam ponders the names of griffons, phoenixes, unicorns and other more predictable beasts.

is what Carroll is after. He does it by juxtaposing hard details and concretely "real" colors with the unexpected, the impossible. He is making a deliberate attempt to intrigue the eye by confounding it and also create an image that, by its very simplicity, cut a shadow on the mind.

When Antonioni was making "Blowup," he went around painting London letterboxes a brighter shade of red and spraying the grass an even-