

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

ART REVIEWS/Helen A. Harrison

Inventing the Narratives
To Go With the Images

'Telling Tales'

Anthony Giordano Gallery, Dowling College, Idle Hour Boulevard, Oakdale, (631) 244-3016. Through Jan. 19.

As a medium of communication, visual art often uses narrative subject matter, from history and scripture to diaristic introspection and private fantasy. In this group exhibition, subjectivity is paramount. The six artists intend their work to tell stories, but all require the viewer to participate in a dialogue with the imagery in order to figure out, or perhaps invent, the narrative content.

Taking a cue from Dada's randomly constructed poetry, Christine Graf chops up her poems and recombines the words in ways that often negate their literal meaning. Shredded, rolled, woven, clumped and collaged, the disconnected words and phrases invite interpretations suggested by their supporting structures. In "Birth Poem," for example, the words emerge like newborns issuing from tubular birth canals.

James Pritchard's wordplay is even more elementary. His "A-Z" series of painted wall reliefs is based on semaphore signal flags, one for each letter of the alphabet. Like the letters themselves, the symbolic colors and shapes can be used to create any narrative; the artist merely supplies the raw material. The purity of this abstraction is sometimes interrupted by concrete details, like tongue depressors and fragments of fruit and vegetable crates, occasional landmarks that prompt recognition in unfamiliar territory.

Using actual books as her starting point, Jenny Feder reworks them as shelters in which the narratives are hidden. The results sometimes include visual puns, as in "The Brothers Ramaz," truncated from Karamazov, and "Modern Police Work," with its disembodied eye. But more often the references are obscure enough to subvert conventional narrative, which is evidently the artist's intention.

Small, theatrical paintings by Bridget Parris reflect provocatively on childhood conflicts and preadolescent dreams. Large, awkward canvases by Roberta Lawson aim for a frisson of sexual tension but fail to deliver. Christine Callahan's color photographs subtly manipulate tone and viewpoint, blurring the boundary that separates straight observation from implication and speculation.



'Dealer's Choice'

Arlene Bujese Gallery, 66 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, (631) 324-2823. Through Jan. 19.

Ms. Bujese's annual recap of the season includes works by 41 regular exhibitors.

The selection of sculpture is especially strong. Among the highlights is an untitled marble carving — part fertility symbol, part benevolent protector — by Costantino Nivola, an iconic example from the late artist's long series of figures inspired by the indigenous art of his native Sardinia.

Another marble piece, Tamara Gianis's "Moon Goddess," uses minimal means to describe its subject. Similarly, Ronnie Chaili's "Hatchling" effectively exploits the inherent character of its material, in this case African wonderstone.

Also noteworthy are "Head Back," a dynamic crumpled torso in bronze by Calvin Albert; "Menhir No. 1," by Hans Van de Bovenkamp; and Luis Coelho's "Jazz," a welded steel horn player.

There are handsome paintings and drawings, too, including Stephanie Brody Lederman's "Montauk" and Priscilla Heine's "Head Study." In the gallery's front window, images skitter across the glazed surface of Carol Hunt's untitled canvas, in which Chinese lettering, calligraphic mark-



Jenny Feder's "Disputed Passage," far left, and Roberta Lawson's "The Wait," left, are part of "Telling Tales," a group show at the Anthony Giordano Gallery at Dowling College in Oakdale.



ings and inscribed textures communicate in several languages.

Pope Noell treats paint as a sculptural material in an untitled panel of thickly layered pigment that has been carved. The effect is both richly decorative and surprisingly evocative, suggesting a colony of exotic undersea creatures.

Although there is no actual "St. Lunette," Josh Dayton has created one only to martyr him or her in an apocalypse of churning colors and forms. The painting represents Mr. Dayton at his most expressionistic, recalling the allusive imagery of Jackson Pollock's early abstractions.

Cooler heads prevail in Gerson Lieber's "Hedges," a geometric chalk-and-charcoal

treatment of precisely trimmed shrubs and trees; Jimmy Ernst's "Sea of Grass" series; and Judith Boucher Sneddon's "Opera Rehearsal."

'Mixed Messages'

Yellow House Works of Art, 422 First Street, Greenport, (631) 477-8673. Through Dec. 29.

Unlike the narratives at Dowling College, the messages in this group show are the kind collected by fans and autograph hounds. In fact signatures are what the show is about — real ones, and so-called

RAUSCHENBERG



SHINERS • GLATS • URBAN BOURBONS

November 9 to December 1, 2002

A poster by Robert Rauschenberg, above, is on view at Yellow House Works of Art in Greenport. Judith Boucher Sneddon's "Opera Rehearsal," left, is part of the annual recap by regular exhibitors at the Arlene Bujese Gallery in East Hampton.

signature images, from a poster that defines Tom of Finland's distinctive brand of homoerotic beefcake to a classic portrait of New York by the photographer Helen Levitt.

The exhibition focuses on autographed reproductions of artists' works, connecting the name to the face, so to speak. Most are postcard size, like Keith Haring's exploding head cartoon and Roy Lichtenstein's comic book knockoff, or signed catalog pages. A few pieces — like David Hockney's canceled check and Robert Rauschenberg's small poster that includes both printed and hand-written signatures — also prompt speculation about the artist's celebrity status.

This issue is addressed by signed vintage photographs of movie stars, including Charlie Chaplin and Lawrence Olivier. Andy Warhol is perhaps the only American visual artist to have achieved similar notoriety, both as a personality and as the creator of widely recognized imagery. But the flip side of fame is obscurity, and the gallery's owner, Geoffrey Leven, cleverly illustrates the point by juxtaposing one of Warhol's popular cow posters with a naive treatment of the same subject by an anonymous early 20th-century painter. The images are almost identical, but one is famous while the other is unknown.