

When a Picture Is Worth More Than Those Thousand Words

By PHYLLIS BRAFF

Peter Hill

Jill's, Main St., Sag Harbor. Through Jan. 5. Daily 10:30 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Handling photography in a way that gives process, art and information fairly equal weight has been Peter Hill's strength in recent years, and this installation nicely calls attention to a range of his themes. The presentation is modest, because it is tucked into shop space that was once a gallery but now serves dual purposes.

Mr. Hill's portraits have been exhibited most frequently and are the best-known aspect of his work. Often two, or even three, different views are printed on a single sheet, adding effectively to the interpretation of character and giving the impression that more information is being offered than would otherwise be sensed in a likeness.

"Richard Nixon, Montauk 1991" is a particularly penetrating example that pairs a tight-lipped image, eyes downward, with a slightly squinting view of the former President showing a definite smile. In a similar vein, the three views of Kurt Vonnegut emphasize different eye positions and give the feeling of observing alternative sides of the author's personality.

Visual invention stands out in the interaction between two profiles of Larry Rivers and in the artistry of the cast shadows in images of the playwright Lanford Wilson. There is also a certain artistry in the way the tilted heads of the artists Eric Fischl

and April Gornik, photographed together, create a diagonal line of eyes.

Mr. Hill explores variations of the 19th-century cyanotype technique, a process that allows the sun to make a blue-toned contact print. By loosely brushing the emulsion over watercolor paper, he produces broad strokes and feathery markings that add energy and immediacy.

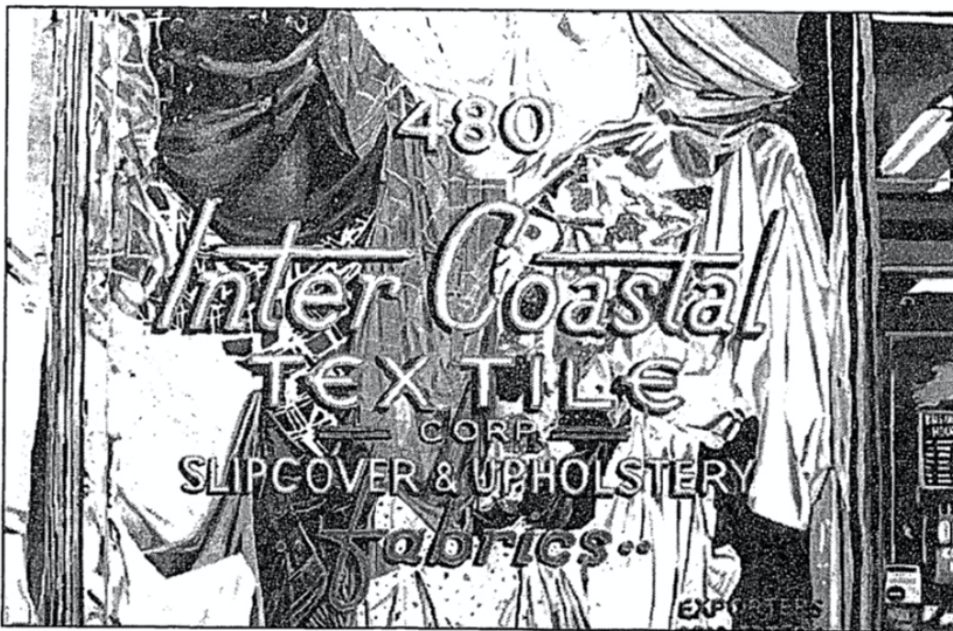
Staged semisurreal scenes incorporating a nude or partly clothed model are a second aspect of Mr. Hill's work, and here the tonality and blur characteristic of the cyanotype make the odd fictions look like puzzling frozen vignettes. The method produces a kind of psychological slowness that both calls attention to the fantasy action portrayed and gives time to ponder its meaning.

Some of the contrived compositions suffer under this uneasy scrutiny, however, and their intended edginess never reaches a transcending mood, perhaps in part because the antique character of the soft blue scene initially implies respect and solemnity.

Cheryl Gross and Harvey Weiss

Bryant Library, 2 Paper Mill Road, Roslyn. Through Jan. 4. Weekdays 9 A.M. to 9 P.M., Saturday 9 to 5 and Sunday 1 to 5.

Ms. Gross's large and lively paintings reveal a fascination with the patterns and expressive contours that can be found in city views, particularly the commercial side, with signs, store windows, restaurant facades and industrial structures.



"Inter Coastal Textiles," an oil on canvas with crayon by Cheryl Gross.

The boldly pigmented canvases are most interesting when they integrate surface and image by emphasizing the two-dimensionality of lettering or the flat silhouettes of industrial roof-lines.

Both visual components are present in "Gold & Silver." The phrase "We Buy Gold and Silver" is lettered across a brown tenement building here. A second example, "Kentile Tower," reduces its description of a factory roof bearing the company sign to a large area of dense black angled against a white sky. It is Ms. Gross's most effective synthesis of reality.

"Water Tower," in a similar vein, also calls attention to the importance of selective cropping to create forceful shapes.

One shop window, "Inter Coastal Textiles," plays its almost abstract crunch of soft crushed fabrics against the stiff emphatic crispness of the store sign. Another comparatively successful example has a social message combined with a clever composition of red, black and white posters

lettered "World Lab Animal Week Rally."

The dozen examples of Mr. Weiss's three-dimensional work all vary in media and approach, and demonstrate his familiarity with the vocabulary of 20th-century sculpture. Most successful is "Slot," a small green-patinaed bronze abstraction that emphasizes the convergence of symbolically weighty forces.

Group Show

Bologna Landi Gallery, 49 Sag Harbor Road, East Hampton. Through Jan. 15. Daily 9:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Organized as a benefit for the East Hampton Mental Health Clinic, this gathering of work by about 25 artists is intentionally diverse, although thematically it is heavily weighted toward landscape and still-life interpretations.

The crowded setting is one that encourages certain pieces to stand apart. Dinah Maxwell Smith's simpli-

fied, luminous, close-in views of a stark French courtyard door, a shadow and an adjacent window are small gems that emphasize the geometry of the architectural elements.

Priscilla Heine's large image of waterlilies floating in a red-rimmed container is a strong painting that dominates the gallery with its vibrating rhythms that seem to update Monet.

Pulsating, swirling rhythms also energize Nancy Greenberg's Polaroid enlargement of yellow pears loosely covered with black grapes. Here the scale change makes images seem slightly otherworldly. The pear shapes become soft and indefinite, with no credible substance, although the highlights and shadows that imply volume remain intact and are even exaggerated.

Imagination and execution combine effectively, too, in a still-life by Joan Liebowitz and a series of paintings by Calvin Grimm that show that nature in the act of dissolving into a jumble of white and colored layers of shimmering strokes of light.

The exhibition includes successful

In Sag Harbor, a closer look at Richard M. Nixon, among others.

landscape studies by Priscilla Bowden, Ralph Carpenter and Robert Dash and fanciful figurative collages by George-Anne Roberts.

Rhoda Needman

Gallery Authentique, 1499 Old Northern Blvd., Roslyn. Through Jan. 16. Wednesdays through Saturdays 11 A.M. to 5 P.M.

Jewel-like, intensely colored small landscapes executed in pastel are Rhoda Needman's concentration. A degree of rich resonance is consistent in her densely applied, unmodulated tones.

Ms. Needman has a nice way of synthesizing the hills, fields and trees that are characteristic of the countryside, and she frequently achieves a bold lyricism that turns the artificiality of her flat forms and arbitrary colors into something expressive and forceful.

To that end, the most successful pieces are those that act as abstractions, emphasizing only overlapping undulating hills or arched pathways. The barns or cottages in other examples seem rigidly anchored and interrupt the sense of rhythmic interaction between abstract shapes. Nondescriptive tones — a blue roadway or a purple hill — help to free color units from a fixed, scenic role.

There is both exuberance and constraint in these landscapes reduced to their sparest contours, for Ms. Needman calls attention to the resulting shapes by outlining them in black, introducing a stained-glass effect.

The vividness has always helped the Needman work stand out in group exhibitions. Confronting a large number of pieces in a small, crowded gallery is another situation, however. Stylization becomes too pronounced, and the sameness of repeated tones links individual scenes into an overall wall pattern.

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