

Society showcases 'Alternative Pastels'

Exhibit departs from tradition

By Wesley Pulkka
For the Journal

Buttery soft, velvety smooth and vividly hued pastels have been a favorite medium for many artists since the Renaissance. The New Mexico Pastel Society is hosting two exhibitions at the New Mexico State Fairgrounds Fine Art Gallery that show the expressive evolution of the medium.

"Alternative Pastels — A Different Reality" showcases the influence of modernism with inventive abstract and unusual works while the "Volunteers" collection utilizes traditional imagery and techniques.

The alternative show curated by Sylvia Ortiz Domney and Bobi Chenhall is in its second year and is beginning to mature with several high-quality works. Participants include 21 guest artists and nine Pastel Society members.

One of the problems that I see with many of these pieces is that when traditional artists try to loosen up they wind up being decorative.

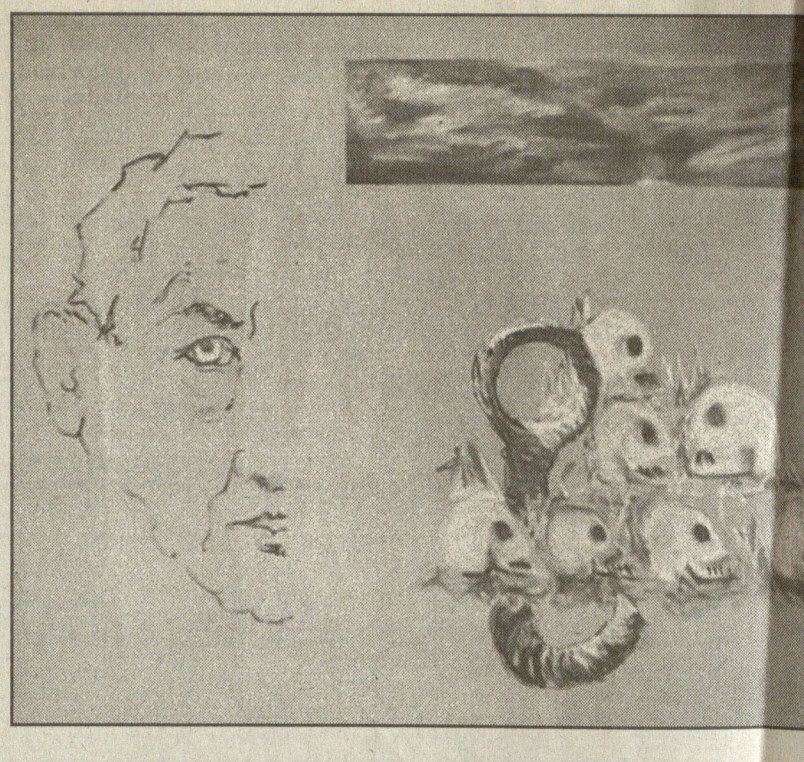
Scott Swezy is a successful decorative artist who has appropriated modernist devices in his figurative works. In "Blue Nude" and "Golden Nude" he plays the curves of the figures against the straight lines of the geometric backgrounds. In both pictures a



SCIENCE AND ART: "Discovery of a Wind System" by Michael Gienger at the New Mexico State Fairgrounds Fine Art Gallery skillfully blends ancient science and contemporary art.



JOINT PROJECT: "Tails, String, Flight," a pastel mural by Wayne Mikosz and Rhia Rothberg, is included in "Alternative Pastels — A Different Reality" through July 30.



If you go

WHAT: "Alternative Pastels — A Different Reality" and "Volunteers" exhibitions

WHEN: 1-4 p.m. Thursdays through July 30

WHERE: New Mexico State Fairgrounds Fine Art Gallery

HOW MUCH: Free

IN PASTELS SHOW: "Hop Frog" by Stephen Spaulding takes a contemporary view of a dark Edgar Allan Poe story about court jester's revenge on an abusive king.

REVIEW

spiral floats in the foreground.

Swezy has discovered a formula that sells well and is sticking with it. His style includes just enough constructivist elements and exaggerated figures (think Picasso and Matisse) to be recognizable to a wide audience.

However, having spent many hours studying Matisse's "Blue Nude" at the Baltimore Museum I can say with authority that the 90-year-old groundbreaking original is far more exciting than Swezy's stylized knock-off.

In contrast, raw originality is the hallmark of works by Domney. In "Turmoil in Heaven" the self-taught artist placed a large white face in the upper left and fills the rest of the space with abstracted figurative and organic shapes. Her work is unrefined, layered and gets more interesting as she develops a personal style.

Domney uses computer graphics programming to design her pieces. She scans in her freehand work and then adds shapes, colors and lines on the computer. She then repaints the whole composition at a larger scale in pastels. The expressionistic results do not look like computer art.

Another artist using computer graphics is Millard Hall. In "Brain Storm" and several other works Hall designs and prints large digital images and then overpaints them with pastels. "Brain Storm" is filled with amorphous shapes and flowing lines that illustrate the birth of thoughts. I like the cosmic feeling in this single work but I wasn't as impressed with his other pieces.

My favorite pure abstraction in the show is "Tails, String, Flight" by Wayne Mikosz and Rhia Rothberg. The artistic team has gained a reputation working side by side in oils and acrylics. I find their foray into pastels more interesting and vital than some of their most successful paintings.

The 4-by-9-foot mural is filled with bright colors, action capturing gestures and pure energy. The duo added a process art touch by hanging their plastic gloves next to the finished piece.

Michael Gienger is a printmaker and draftsman known for his elegant drawing style and unique cultural perspective. His "Discovery of a Wind System" is a wonderfully drawn, subtly hued and slightly surreal excursion into a Hieronymus Bosch-inspired imaginary realm. Gienger skillfully blends ancient science and contemporary art. He pays his bills by teaching people how to read. I guess he makes art to teach people how to see.

Book illustrator and graphic artist Catherine Edlinger-Kunze has an abstract expressionist-inspired figurative style that is well represented by three selections from her "Traumzeit"

series. Her pastels are well-drawn, Earth-toned and emotionally charged.

Edgar Allan Poe's writings are the basis for four pieces by artist/craftsman Stephen Spaulding, who studied art at the Pratt Institute in New York before landing a job in the Metropolitan Museum's conservation department. He moved to Placitas more than 20 years ago where he makes art, restores antique sports cars and builds custom furniture and cabinetry.

My favorite Spaulding piece is "Hop Frog," which illustrates Poe's story of a dwarf court jester who outsmarted and eliminated an abusive king. The work features a large portrait sketch, a hand-painted, appropriated J.M.W. Turner landscape and seven flaming skulls.

"La Ventana" by Jorge L. Fernandez is a spare and elegant abstraction. Santos de los Angeles is a talented tinsmith who usually

works in a very traditional style. His abstract pastel "Le Puerta Verde" is a nice departure for the artist.

The show includes a couple of surprising works by student artists Bill Fan and Alexandra Chase. "Self Portrait" by Fan is reminiscent of California Bay Area figure painting of the 1950s and 1960s. The strongly composed piece could easily disappear in a David Park or Elmer Bischoff retrospective from that period.

Though it's not a completely original style Fan's solid craftsmanship and good composition make him an interesting young artist. If he discovered his imagery independently, which often happens, then he should study the work of the above mentioned artists and allow his vision to develop over time.

Chase at age 11 also shows enormous talent. Her "My Most Favorite Things" includes a green

teddy bear, yellow rubber ball and blue trumpet surrounded by musical notations. Her work is very well composed and crafted.

The popularity of pastel impressionism as the only way to use pastels. Domney's and Chenhall's selections point the way to an alternative to the pretty but endless and repetitive flow of impressionist pastels.

There are many other paths past Degas, such as the incredible photo-realism of Albuquerque's Robert Peterson, who was not in the show. However, the Pastel Society should be commended for supporting alternatives. I wonder how many members consider this exhibition heretical?

Don't miss it. If you hate it, the "Volunteers" show should calm your nerves.

CRITICS CORNER

Anaya's 'Matachines' a pleasing production

By Ann L. Ryan
For the Journal

"Matachines," playing at the South Broadway Cultural Center, is another presentation of La Casa Teatro and another collaboration between Rudolfo Anaya, who wrote the play, and Cecilia Aragón, who directed it.

Like previous La Casa Teatro productions, it is bilingual. It has enough English for any non-Spanish speaker to feel comfortable, but enough Spanish, especially colloquial New Mexican Spanish, to make the production fun.

There are problems, too, that have appeared in other Anaya-Aragón collaborations: "Matachines" moves very slowly, and the plot holds no surprises in its language or in its action: what you expect to happen is pretty much what happens, with a couple of exceptions.

The story is simple. Cristina (Ruby Bustos) is a sweet young woman scheduled to dance the part of Malinche in the Matachines procession. She is in love with Lorenzo (Rick Ortega), who will dance the part of the Monarca, or Montezuma.

Malinche is the name of the Aztec woman who betrayed Montezuma, the Aztec ruler, to Cortés. Malinche and Cortés fell in love, and she bore him children, the first mestizos. Malinche, who took the name Maria, is seen as the Mother of the Mexican race and culture. In this Matachines dance, she is both Malinche and the Virgin Mary.

Dancing the role of the bull is Andres (Cesar Gonzalez), and here the bull is also the Devil, due to be castrated by the sword that Cristina is adorning with flowers as the play opens.

Like his character, Andres is possessed by evil, in this case a blinding lust for Cristina.

Surrounding these three are Cristina's sister Rita (Maria Theresa Herrera), who is in love with Lorenzo; and Teresa (Teresa Han-

If you go

WHAT: "Matachines" by Rudolfo Anaya, directed by Cecilia Aragón, presented by La Casa Teatro

WHEN: Fridays and Saturdays at 7 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m., through July 23

WHERE: South Broadway Cultural Center, 1025 Broadway SE

HOW MUCH: Tickets are \$8, students and seniors \$7. For information and reservations, call 848-1320

lon), who is made mute by the crime she sees; their father Don Patricio (Rosario Garcia), the patriarch of the small village of Plaza Vieja; Juan (Gino Noriega) and Zonzo (Alexi Castillo), young men of the village; the priest (Joe Filipi); and Don Cornelio and Doña Francisca (Gonzalo Rucobo and Aggie Martinez), he of the bullwhip and she of the sharp tongue.

This is a two-act play, and the first act sails along nicely, if a little slowly. Aragón uses the space well, a hard thing to do on SBCC's stage. The actors are pleasing, especially Herrera and Gonzalez, perhaps because they get to play the bad guys.

The second act feels more slapdash, as if Anaya didn't give it a second reading. Things don't make sense. Don Patricio seems to say "He will get better" about a character who is dead, and Andres' father, being chased toward the river, foils them by taking the time to hang himself. I expected him to drown, I guess.

Still, this is a mostly pleasing play, and it explores an element of New Mexican culture that few of us know about, or know enough about: the Matachines dance-drama.

'Comedy of Errors' barrels of fun in Western dress

By Ann L. Ryan
For the Journal

Shakespeare's plays are delicious when staged outside, especially his comedies. In the first place, they were originally produced outside (the Globe Theatre had no roof, remember), and most of the action takes place outside.

In fact, in "The Comedy of Errors," playing at La Entrada park in Corrales, all the action takes place outside, in the streets of Ephesus.

"The Comedy of Errors" is one of Shakespeare's funniest, lightest comedies, and the New Mexico Shakespeare Festival's presentation of it, directed by Jennifer Lister, is giddy and full of piffle, exactly as it should be.

The plot is complicated, but this is how it starts: two sets of twin baby boys are separated by a shipwreck. One set, Antipholus and his servant Dromio (Jay Lewis and Jason Witter), have grown up in Ephesus where their mother Emilia (Connie J. McElyea) is in a convent. The other set, Antipholus and his servant Dromio of Syracuse (John Pasha and Ross Kelly), have come to Ephesus with their father Egeon (Rick Blumenfeld), looking for the lost twins and Emilia.

Egeon is arrested, clapped into prison and soon to be hanged, because Syracusians who land in Ephesus either pay a large fine or die.

That's what sets everything off, and just about every complication that you can think of happens. Antipholus of Ephesus has a wife, Adriana (Megan McCormick); a sister-in-law (Wendy Leverenz); a friendly courtesan (Leslee M. Filusch); debts and a gold chain that's a present for the wife (or is it the courtesan?)...?

That's the situation A. and D. of Syracuse are thrown into, as they try to save their father.

Director Jennifer Lister (who also directs "Romeo and Juliet," which plays in the evenings with many of the same cast) has cut "The Comedy of Errors" down to one act, two hours long. The brevity is a blessing, especially

If you go

WHAT: "The Comedy of Errors" by William Shakespeare, directed by Jennifer Lister and presented by the New Mexico Shakespeare Festival.

WHEN: Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m., through Aug. 6. Playing in repertory with "Romeo and Juliet."

WHERE: La Entrada Park in Corrales, 2.3 miles north of the intersection of Corrales Road and Alameda

HOW MUCH: Tickets: Chair seating, \$12, ground seating \$10. Tickets at Corrales Printing and mailing, TicketMaster, and at the door an hour before the show. Group rates available. For information, call 244-3633.

considering the heat, sun and wind, but the lack of an intermission may need some rethinking. Everybody was wilted and squirmy by the end of Saturday's premiere, especially the very young children in the audience.

But, oh, what fun this is! It's set in a cartoon version of the Wild West, with the Longbunch saloon as the Porpentine. The Antipholuses (Antipholi?) and Dromios wear polka-dot boxer shorts, red for the Syracuse boys, blue for the Epheseans. The Antipholuses wear chaps, and the jailer has on an ENORMOUS cowboy hat. The courtesan is Mae West, done to a turn by Filusch, and Adriana is a belly dancer when she tries to seduce the wrong Antipholus. McCormick and Leverenz are marvelous as sisters, and they play off each other beautifully.

Rehearsals were a hoot, according to a crew member I spoke with after the performance, and so is this production, especially with Barbara Bock and Ann Carnevale's costumes, Richard Hess' set, and Phil Bock's music. It's well worth the wind, the sun, the heat, and the drive.

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