

# ART

BY L.P. STREITFELD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**O**n March 11, The New York Times front-page headline announced a deadly bomb explosion in Spain. Margaret Roleke responded by pasting the headline on a blank postcard and mailing it to the Branchville Gallery, recently purchased by her friend, Brian Sullivan. This and the postcards that followed were taped to the gallery window as they arrived. In this manner, a piece of mail gave birth to a guerilla-style art show celebrating the grand opening of a cutting-edge gallery.

"BLAST!" is the title of Roleke's mail art installation in the front window of the gallery introducing the inaugural exhibition of the same name. Facing outside are the backs of the postcards with newspaper photos of war and turmoil. The other sides form a photo collage of the artist celebrating with family and friends. Roleke also sent mailing tubes, which could be mistaken for rockets, plastered with photos of people wearing face masks evoking memories of 9/11 and the terrorist environment.

Roleke began her current art as a response to Sept. 11 in a storefront East Village gallery where she exhibited photographs of everyday people wearing face masks. White guerilla exhibitions have the agility to respond to real world events, often their edge is undermined by favoring the instantaneous contribution of friends rather than a more detached and measured approach to exhibiting art.

However, built into the theme of "BLAST!" is getting friends together to celebrate creativity. Roleke has assembled an eclectic group of 10 local artists who speak to the alarming state of the world in original ways.

A sense of false security is provided by the collaborative team of Joan Wheeler and Chandler Davis, whose six-foot baby dolls add to the quirky excitement of the show. Despite cheery names such as Sunny and Morning Glory, the works in this context appear more sinister than cuddly, thereby heightening the edginess of an exhibition built around a dichotomy defining an age.

Mary Dwyer instructs on the history of terrorism with her menacing pirates in her characteristic flat, colonial style of painting. D. Dominick Lombardi's horrifying yet compassionate view of the human effects of contemporary blasts is also a futuristic view of the effects on human biology of everyday environmental contamination. His intricate process of reverse acrylic painting on Plexiglas transmits this alarming vision through the everyday language of the tattoo/comic figure that penetrates beyond the polished surface. Lombardi's message is all the more searing due to his figures' compelling emotional expression; they wear their hearts, so to speak, exter-

Please see "BLAST!" Page B4

## New gallery opens with a 'BLAST!'



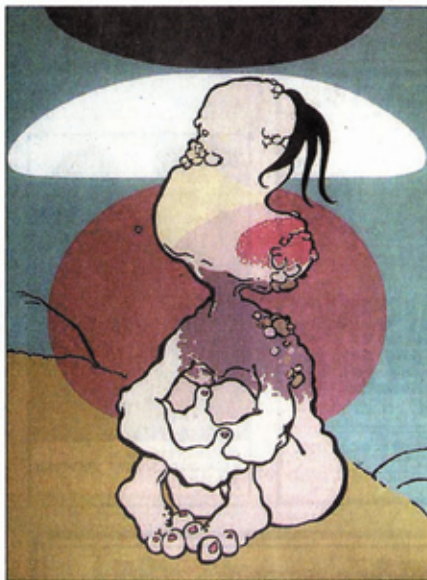
"Untitled" by Mary Dwyer.



"Med" by David Cramer.



"BLAST!" by Margaret Roleke.



"Queen at First Light" by D. Dominick Lombardi.

## 'BLAST!'

Continued from Page D3

nally on their mutated forms.

Nearly, an untitled drawing by Chris Durante enters the dialogue with an internal view of what appears to be a color wrapping. Eva Lee's lyrical drawings relate to explosions in space. Adding more tension is Amy Allen's wall installation of 2004 burnt birthday candles.

"The Insanity Series" by photographer Osker Martinez addresses emotional breakdown

through a stylized aesthetic that is both truthful and visually compelling. The iconic image of the physically bound/emotionally free woman struggling in a straightjacket derives tension from its subject matter — the chic body, slick hairstyle and full facial makeup of a fashion plate — making this work positively revel in the compelling dichotomy of the exhibition theme.

What's the alternative to feeling? Brian Sullivan offers a futur-

istic view of armored woman with his android babe figures with missile breasts, zoned out, electrified and deformed.

A David Cramer assemblage in the shape of a cross sums up our cataclysmic age of transition. The fish body of the Piscean Age gives way to the Aquarian human head topped by a cowboy hat. "Med" seems to be alerting us to an undeniable truth: we can no longer blame the gods for our troubles, but must look inside of ourselves.

"BLAST!" is on view until June 20 at Branchville Gallery, 14 W. Branchville Road in Ridgefield, behind the Branchville train station, on the Ridgefield/Redding border. Gallery hours are Fridays, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays, 2-5 p.m.; and by appointment. The public is invited to "Art Talk" on Thursdays, 7-9 p.m. Area artists are invited to attend and bring photos of their work. Call 470-2542 or e-mail [branchville.art@optonline.net](mailto:branchville.art@optonline.net).



"The Dolls, Lucy" by Chandler Davis and Joan Wheeler.

# ART

## Restoring the character balance at Silvermine



"Spectator" by Nina Levy.

BY L.P. STREITFELD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**N**elen Klisser-During has scored a significant coup in creating yet another magical blend at Silvermine Guild Arts Center. With the rarely exhibited collections of Theodore C. Rogers and the Hirsch and Adler Gallery of New York City, she sets the stage for a lively examination of a new movement in personal narrative taking hold in the art world.

"Edward Hopper & John Marin's New York" is an exhibition of 31 works on paper illuminating the city that provided the inspiration for Hopper's bleak view of America. Across the way, "Characters: Scene II," is part of a two-part exhibition curated by Helianthe Bourdeux-Maurin, an independent French art historian and curator residing in New York City, who also

### REVIEW

wrote the catalog. "Characters: Scene I" is on view at the Shore Institute of the Contemporary Arts in Long Branch, N.J., through April 26.

Where do authentic uprisings emerge other than the grassroots? "Characters: Scene II" marks Silvermine as co-host to a new movement delivered into the international art world. Bourdeux-Maurin's fresh and lively approach to story-telling through a global focus on character serves as an ironic contrast to Hopper, who utilized New York City as a character to externalize his personal emotional isolation.

Hopper's loneliness was exacerbated by his dogged insistence in developing a style that portrayed people disconnected from their environment. His stark urban interiors reflecting bleak cityscapes from their windows provided a dour contrast to the exuberance of the Jazz Age reflected by his contemporaries.

Yet Hopper continues to be vindicated through time as an American classic whose signature style was prophetic in depicting how the authentic characters of people and places are doomed by the sterile march of technological progress.

"Characters" arrives as a welcome remedy to restore the balance.

This engaging show is full of unexpected surprises highlighting emerging talent. Liberated from the didacticism of 20th-century movements, these artists are free to focus on developing their narrative technique into signature styles pioneering a new language of symbol and allegory reflecting gender balance and holism. Moreover, what we see here is an emphasis on personal narrative restoring interconnections lost in our hyper-masculine society.

Thus we have the appeal of "Moon," a screenprint by Takashi Murakami, the Japanese artist who inspired legions of young American art students with his iconic graphic imagery. In this context, D. Dominick Lombardi claims his



"Johnny Two Heads" by D. Dominick Lombardi.

position at the forefront with his explosive personal imagery incorporating universal concerns about the environment and hazards of nuclear fallout.

What distinguishes the artists of "Characters II" is the spirit of playfulness that the maverick Reuben Nakan fused into his erotically charged imagery after he dropped out of the international art scene to go underground in his Stamford studio. The erotic in art was long repressed by the hegemony of the politically correct in which feminist theorists elevated poster girl Cindy Sherman into the stratosphere.

Yet, in the context of Nina Levy's "Spectator" self-portrait satirically depicting the artist with an oversized ego, Sherman is relegated to her rightful place as soul-depleted world-weary den mother in a room of rebellious youth. With

Please see **SILVERMINE**, Page D4



"Guitar Girl" by Yoshitomo Nara.

■ Continued from Page D3

breakthrough new work poking fun at the uptight feminist condemnation of traditional female roles, Silvermine artist Joan Wheeler joins an international crowd of patriarchy who refuse to fall into the patriarchal good girl/bad girl polarities. Yoshitomo Nara, Chitra Ganesh, Fay Ku, Kyung Jeon and Izima Kaoru stake out bold new erotic terrain which long confined Robert Crumb to the underground.

Along with the phallic-charged imagery of Phillip Guston, Crumb provides necessary gender balance launching a new crop of highly talented emerging male artists such as James Jean, Michael Rice, Robert Neeson and Jeremy Bronson, who beautifully deconstructs the mechanistic world view with his mesmerizing surreal "Timekeepers" video.

There is an exuberance blowing through Silvermine as a result of throwing off the oppressive histo-

ry that confined character to deconstructionist interpretations of the "male gaze." Here we have a timely acknowledgement of an authentic process by which the resurrection of the divine feminine can reach a popular audience.

The brilliant juxtaposition of Hopper with "Characters: Scene II" reveals that the transformation from the personal to the universal is key to characterization carrying significance beyond the art world. Bourdeux-Maurin provides us with an admirable

show of recognition that the joyous expression of spirit through character finally has a place. This is a wonderful thing because the public is certainly ready for it.

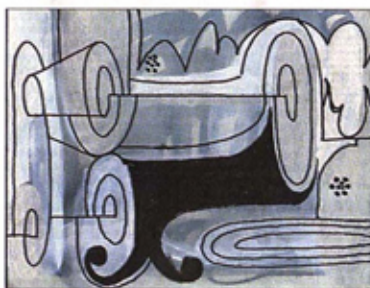
"Edward Hopper & John Marin's New York" and "Characters: Scene II" will be on view until April 26 at Silvermine Galleries. Hours are Tuesday-Saturday 11 a.m.-5 p.m., and Sunday, 1-5 p.m. 1037 Silvermine Road in New Canaan. Call 966-9700, ext. 20.

# ART

## Transformation or Death at Branchville Gallery



"Blue Boy" by D. Dominick Lombardi.



"Abstract Noir 3" by Kenneth J. Marchione.



"Shrunken Head 8" by D. Dominick Lombardi.



"Heads 900" by D. Dominick Lombardi.



"Ophelia" by Kenneth J. Marchione.

### BY I.P. STREITFELD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Is there still a place for the hot button of human passion in the digital age? Perhaps the most pertinent art right now is that which consciously addresses unwieldy emotion as a dynamic new form of Pop.

At Branchville Gallery this month, D. Dominick Lombardi and Kenneth J. Marchione establish a timely and essential dialogue regarding the very

## REVIEW

form by which slick Pop surrealism explodes with the messiness of human emotion to create a new dynamism of beauty incorporating the shadow of the grotesque. This sophisticated exchange goes a long way in explaining the great attraction of the Japanese post-apocalyptic graphic style mindlessly reflected in the work of recent art school graduates in America.

For his "Abstract Noir Series" of acrylic and gouche collages and paintings, Marchione uses Ophelia, the doomed archetypal female in Shakespeare's "Hamlet" as a launching point for an exploration of evolving interior space. The conceptual series begins with mazelike renderings on a shower curtain, displayed in the window of the gallery. A cut-out rendering of an arm

and leg surrounding the cross-shaped assemblage provides a generic message: Ophelia, whose love was thwarted by the preening arrogant ("Get thee to a nunnery") Hamlet, exists in every one of us. When Eros is sadistically denied in this patriarchal universe, what joy can we expect from life?

Lombardi gives us a clear and devastating vision of where we are headed. His longtime series of post-apocalyptic heads continues to transform. In the Branchville Gallery's inaugural exhibition, "Blast," he displayed genetically mutated figures that still retained human characteristics and all-too-human emotions. On view here are several of his slick India ink "Heads," distorted beyond recognition while delivering the visceral punch of the self-devoured; and the gorgeously executed "Shrunken Heads" color paintings on Plexiglas, rendering tint as mutated stains respecting no boundaries other than their own. The most recent "Post Apocalyptic Tattoo Series" of limited edition silkscreenprints begins an internal dialogue between several of these ferocious characters inside one narrative frame, thereby illuminating

his work's inherent cinematic quality. In the completed arc of this highly evolved and self-contained narrative series on the human head, the surface has been stripped away until the viewer is viscerally confronted with a ravaged brain bent on cannibalizing itself for expression. Devolution of consciousness brought on by human apathy?

We stare uncomprehending, as if witness to Ophelia's internal disintegration while numbly singing prophecies of her own demise. If we take her as the traditional form of female beauty, as passive and ethereal, both artists here push their technique to a new ideal of beauty that is dynamic, visceral and playfully free of preconceptions. The result becomes like a visual jazz, where beauty and grotesque are locked in inseparable rhythm, one unable to be defined without the other.

It may be said here that if we don't recognize and accept that which we find most hideous in ourselves, then we may become the very thing — the Lombardi mutant — which we deny. So, where does this invigorating dialogue regarding societal repression and denial of human emotion

deliver us? For a start, a recognition that the human finger poised on the hot button of the nuclear age is more likely than not being guided by passion. So, here we arrive at the body conscious conclusion of this cycle of entrapment: transformation or death.

The exhibition of recent works of Kenneth J. Marchione and D. Dominick Lombardi will be on view through Feb. 13, when the artists will give a gallery closing talk at 3:30 p.m. Gallery hours are Friday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 2-5 p.m.; and by appointment. Branchville Gallery is at 14 W. Branchville Road behind the Branchville train station. Call 544-8332.