

By **Mary Hrbacek**

Curated by Kathleen Goncharov, this group show, *Apocalyptic Pop*, presents works imbued with a sense of foreboding. The issues here range from terrorism, environmental degradation, and economic melt-down to religious extremism. Employing simple outlines used in the creation of cartoon characters or animation narratives, the artists stress a humorous element that lifts the atmosphere of the exhibit in a spirit that accepts life's unpredictability. Jody Culkin, Michael Zansky, TODT, D. Dominick Lombardi, Laura Parnes and Chitra Ganesh all express feelings that partake of society's sense of ill-starred destiny.

Jody Culkin questions visual appearances in her photographs of tiny charms found in bling jewelry, magnified with an electron microscope. The charms transform visually, giving the impression of fragmented sculptures that convey an immediate connection with the antiquities found at Pompeii; the pocked, worn appearance of these remnants elicits a sense of grief that portends the sadness that tragedy can imprint on a locality. These photographs highlight the vulnerability of sensory perception subject to technological manipulation.

In his wooden dioramas, Michael Zansky investigates the vicissitudes of optical perception, em-

ploying thick, grooved glass that makes both a visual bridge and a barrier to viewing the objects within the dioramas. When seen at certain angles the glass blurs, obstructing the interior elements. The viewing process demonstrates metaphorically that when close to a situation it is often hard to see it clearly. Zansky includes characters culled from history and philosophy, entertainment, art history, and sports. Zansky explores the swings between superstition and reason throughout history. He includes Voltaire and the Three Stooges in his scenarios, emphasizing that the realities of history are constructed by and subject to the viewpoint of the on-looker.

The collaborative group TODT's installation, entitled "Reaper," consists of farm machinery made with a grid of sharp steel blades, situated on soil-like turf. The piece accentuates the inevitability of the cycle of birth and death, underscored by the massive blades of the reaping machine. The blades generate viewer fascination with the macabre aspect of this iconic installation.

In his sculpture "Beachcomber" (sand, acrylic, medium and objects), D. Dominick Lombardi employs the simple forms and contours found in videogame figures. He uses sand, the quintessential artistic medium of symbolic impermanence to convey the passage of time. Sand ignites childhood memories of castles dissolving in the ocean's tide. Lombardi keeps one side of his sculpture intact, while the exposed side reveals painted blue plastic cleanser bottles, children's forgotten toys and bro-

ken shells that mirror the color of water and sky. The piece stresses the uncomfortable fact that our commercial culture focuses on mundane material things that pollute the environment as well as the spirit. They are not biodegradable. The intact sand "gun" implies that such priorities dehumanize us, killing spiritual values.

Chitra Ganesh's images of fantastic hybrid bodily deformities suggest results of scientific exploration with nuclear materials, or thalidomide deformities. She works with flattened space, captioned text bubbles, and outlined, complex forms. These visually arresting, disturbing works pair text with imagery in a challenging balancing act. The written notes compete for attention with the forms, creating viewer tension. Ganesh accesses the Hindu destroyer God

Shiva in neo-mythological studies that explore the drives and dreams that can precipitate both personal and global crises.

It is no surprise that sensitive artists have channeled universal feelings of societal unease into art that taps into general viewer concerns. America has been assailed for some time by politicians determined to use the system for power and profit. In the 1950's, President Dwight Eisenhower warned against the self-serving excesses of the Military-Industrial Complex. In our time, the earmarks of Hollywood melodrama have merged with religious fanaticism and celebrity worship, to create an unbalanced caricature culture about which it can be said that "the sleep of reason produces monsters." **M**



Michael Zansky *Order of Magnitude*, 2008. Digital print. 30 x 40 inches.
Courtesy: Dorsky Gallery, New York



D. Dominick Lombardi *Whistling Bird*, 1998. Wood, acrylic, plastic laundry soap bottle. 16.5 x 17 13.5 inches
Courtesy: Dorsky Gallery, New York