

The mighty effort of many of the curators and directors of the area's finest art centers is evident this spring in the "Beyond/ In Western New York" show. Brought together by a new vision for the Albright-Knox Art Gallery's biennial regional artist exhibition, the fruits of their label are vast. Coordinated by Albright-Knox Curator Assistant, Kristin Carbone, this exhibition bridges thirteen spaces with the impressive artwork by artists from Western New York, Northern Pennsylvania and Southern Ontario. The exhibition openings were staggered over three weeks, and the spaces will begin closing this week (Hallwalls closes May 31, CEPA closes June 4 and Big Orbit closes June 11), so time is running out to get the full experience of this vast (if not comprehensive) survey of regional art.

Allentown

Allentown venues provide an impressive group of artists. Alberto Rey's transformation of El Museo's small storefront gallery space, with a mossy green/grey-colored paint, is quite astounding. "Biological Regionalism" ties Rey's current life in Western New York to Cuba, where he was born. Well-known in the area for his earlier works, which were often political, an exhibit about nature from this artist seems unusual. It's not really, though. Rey's work has always fed directly from the life he lives, and looking at the largest scope of the world—isn't nature one of the most important current political arenas? Often, being swept under the carpet, our interactions with the natural world have major effect on, well, everything.

An avid fly fisherman, Alberto Rey spends much of his time in the tributaries that feed Lake Erie. This exhibit pairs a video of Lake Erie in winter with video Rey shot on a fishing trip in Cuba last summer. On opposite walls, the two videos are paired with two paintings each: one of the physical land and a second of a swimming fish. The video is slow, as are the paintings, and you imagine the quiet, peaceful experience of being in the water, fishing.

From Nature to PSYCHOBABBLE

Beyond/ In Western New York bridges the region

BY CYNNIE GAASCH AND ERIC JACKSON-FORSBERG

The exhibit really exists as one artwork, and the piece pleads with contemporary culture not to leave the natural world behind.

Not far away, just on the other side of Main Street, the Langston Hughes Institute offers up two local artists new to my radar, Rodney Taylor and Jolene Rickard. Taylor has a studio in the building, and his collages are scratchy and soft, subtle and loose. He pairs barely-there images of dogs, plant life and people in watercolor, ink and pencil on small panels of multi-colored paper. The works range in emotion from mysteriously scary to beautifully buoyant. He supplies just enough content to allow you your own narrative in each piece.

Rickard's installation, composed of a line of large rocks and four photographs of crusty snow suspended from above by invisible threads, also speaks to the land. An American Indian, Rickard manipulates the black and white photographs with bands of light and dark, giving them the feel of endlessness. The piece concisely provides a statement of Native Americans' timeless connection to the earth.

Squeaky Wheel offers a series of screenings of video, film and new media by artists exploring diversity, European colonialism, identity, and the current war in Iraq by artists Shelley Niro, Siew-wai Kok, Allyson Mitchell, Christina Zeidler and John Knecht. The final screening will be on June 10 at 8pm, with recent works by

John Knecht. The videos have a preoccupation with notions of the afterlife and the end of the world, translated through a colorful, pop culture cartoon world.

Not exactly in Allentown, but not far away, Big Orbit Gallery on Essex Street is home to a grand-scale technological feast, with Paul Vanouse's "The Active Stimulation Feedback Platform." A platform 16 feet in diameter, fashioned with a sensor button every four inches or so, serves as the interactive tool that can provide a quiet interlude of sound or a cacophony of layering voices. Each of the sound buttons, which correspond to a red dot that projects onto a computerized, morphed map of the world on the adjacent wall, stores a "yes" or "no" sound bite recorded from 2,000 people around the world. A kind of global experimentation, the piece doesn't quite bring about any major new visions for life on this planet, but it is kind of like being in one of those giant rooms filled with colorful balls—a playland for adults.

—cynn timer gaasch

ing installation at Big Orbit last year, this piece more successfully takes an uncomfortable feeling of the body and translates it into form. Here, Ha places an eight-foot fetus on the floor, whose skin is made of black tile, grouted in white, with a drain for an umbilical cord. Light shimmers off the reflective surface in the dimly lit space. A video of the artist, masked and in white, shows her cleaning the surface of the fetus with something that looks like disinfectant. A literal translation brings the piece to a statement of a child's drain on a woman's body, and the woman's need to rid her of the fetal body. Not exactly an advertisement for abortion, but certainly an argument for it.

Diffused American bombs are the primary material in Anitra Hamilton's work. She decorates the surface of the bombs—one with ornamented eggshells—creating a symbol of the affection in politics and media for lightening and prettying the realities of war and territoriality.

—cynn timer gaasch

Albright-Knox Art Gallery

The Albright-Knox is home to ten artists and one artist team—Joy Adams, David Baeumler, Peter Byrne, Cora Cluett, Ben and Jeanne Dunkle, DeWitt Godfrey, Insoo Ha, Anitra Hamilton, Kelly Mark, Shelley Niro and Kelly Palmer. The majority of the works are surprisingly "traditional," two-dimensional works on paper, or paint on canvas. The most impressive

Castellani Art Museum

Arranged on the three massive walls of the Castellani Art Museum's massive main gallery, the aesthetic decisions of artists Eric Glavin, Edward J. Luce and Julian Montague speak to each other. Each artist works makes work with clear color choices and fairly graphic forms that read well from a distance. Eric Glavin and Julian



Insoo Ha's "..." is at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery.



above: Corinne Carlson's "Billboard" is located on Main Street, just before you hit the Tri-Main Center on your way to Amherst from downtown.

Montague compose painting like images on the computer. Glavin's excerpts of architecture are digitally printed on canvas, so from a distance they look like paintings made with a brush. Montague's paintings are more painterly in form, the drawings of bug species made from cut paper, which is then scanned in to create the layered, eclectic graphics printed in black against a single color on paper. His work is yet another giving call to nature, and man's ability to manipulate it.

Edward J. Luce installs a group of small and large paintings of men and fascinations. A bunny rabbit and wooded scenes paired with bearded men talk to the world of gay men in rural America. The paint-

ings are layered and colorful, ranging from mournful to syncopated disco in mood.

—cynn timer gaasch

Burchfield-Penney Art Center

With its mission dedicated to "the art and vision... of distinguished artists of Buffalo-Niagara and Western New York State," the Burchfield Penney Art Center is a central node in the web of "Beyond/ In Western New York". Work on view at the BPAC runs the gamut of media and modes of expression—from vivid, naturalistic painting to the experimental frontiers of digital media.

In the first gallery, we find that Alfonso Volo's selection of work at Hallwalls was just the tip of the iceberg for this artist, who continues to develop multiple series of work in an eclectic array of media. Volo's series "Are These Not Animals" is well represented, with paintings and knit / found object assemblages that offer surreal explorations of the forms and functions of "vermin" such as mice, worms and fruit flies. Some of these works seem to embody Volo's autobiographical worldview; "Attempted Self Portrait as Fruit Fly" and "The Intellectual Worm" present provocative hybrids of lowly creatures and cerebral humans—the artist-as-insect, if you will. "Display and Reflection" approaches this existential issue from another direc-

tion, presenting worm shit ("castings") as gilded artifacts in a velvet jewelry box.

The theme of animals subject to human intellectual manipulation is echoed in Meg Knowles' "Wetspot," a video installation in which live fish act as biological ornamentation in an environment ruled by chaos theory. Knowles' piece inspires contemplation of an attraction like Marineland and its ironic proximity to the natural aquatic wonder of Niagara Falls.

Perhaps the most ambitious—and obsessive—body of work in the exhibition is Jim Morris' "Piece of Mind" series. This array of 54 mixed media drawings consists of densely layered studies of concepts such as

"Information Hierarchies," "Connective Nodes," and "Data Pathways." In his campaign to make such abstract phenomena visual (if not tangible), Morris produces small worlds that are engrossing individually, and overwhelming in constellations.

Cousins to Allen Topolski's "Appliance Series" (at Hallwalls), Marc Böhlen's "Two Whistling Machines" share their relatives' uncanny blend of animation and inertia. Their loudspeaker-like "faces" invite us to interact with them as beloved pets; we are instructed to communicate with them in the abstract language of whistling, and find that they respond in kind. When denied such stimulation for too long, these synthetic beings will begin a whistling conversation with each other. This apparent artificial intelligence invokes the curious humanity—and icy emotional detachment—of the HAL 9000 of 2001: A Space Odyssey.

The work of Joe Miller stands out in the exhibition as highly accomplished naturalism in the neo-Old Master tradition of painters like Odd Nerdrum. Miller's drawings and paintings often allude to familiar figures and compositions from 19th century art: "The Bathers" is a contemporary update of Manet's "Luncheon on the Grass," the figures set before an ominous, industrial landscape, while "Flag" is Bouguereau's "Goose Girl" with a post-9/11 twist. But Miller also mines the popular imagery of film: the haunting twin girls of "Offering" resemble the phantom playmates of the Overlook Hotel in Kubrick's *The Shining*. Miller demonstrates that there is still a vital and evolving tradition of naturalism in painting—one that can

encompass a wealth of historical and popular iconography.

Driven by the color and composition of Matisse, the bold abstraction of African sculpture and the improvisational energy of jazz, William Cooper's distinctive paintings are well-known in—and beyond—Western New York. Cooper has noted that "color...shapes the mood of the composition and creates rhythm and harmony" in his work. Such expressive formalism certainly comes to the fore, although Cooper's subjects are often equally engaging: "Strange Fruit" is a nightmarish vision of Billie Holiday's classic lament on lynching, and "Naming Ceremony" is a vision of the archetypal story of creation and the naming of things.

The video offerings in the Burchfield-Penney's Screening Room are no less diverse and innovative than the exhibition as a whole. Aaron Miller's two untitled pieces are closed, organic systems of audio and video—the closest that many of us will ever get to synesthesia. In sharp contrast to Miller's purely formal work, Jody LaFond's humorous shorts are content-driven biographical vignettes. "I just want to be a structuralist filmmaker" is a parody of formalism, as LaFond pines to make work "devoid of content." "Flopsy and Mopsy OD'd on Chemlawn" is an impressionistic mockumentary about a bohemian everywoman's move to the suburbs. Jamie O'Neil's (aka Kurt Weibers) work draws on the familiar tropes of the corporate promotional video and trade show display to promote bogus "secrets to success" such as "Relative Time Management" and "Identity Systems." Weibers (O'Neil's video persona) coolly pitches a blend of corporate jargon and self-help

psychobabble as the spokesman for the fictional Global Point Strategies.

—eric jackson-forsberg

Buffalo Arts Studio

The work in Buffalo Arts Studio's installment of "Beyond / In..." is as challenging as it is rewarding to the audience. BAS Exhibits Coordinator Rebecca Moda notes that this work "changes the perceptions of its audience, affecting them at a more fundamental level."

Joel Seah's "So Long at the Fair" series is a cross-cultural study of expatriatism and spectacle. In these toy-box-like constructions, Seah juxtaposes snapshots from the New York State Fair with family photos from his origins in Singapore. These representations of East and West are only loosely correlated in the candy-colored boxes, suggesting that translation from one culture to another is inherently an imperfect process.

Deceptively simple in terms of materials and composition, Millie Chen's sound installation, "call," provides a solitary, contemplative, and ultimately enigmatic experience. Drawn into a dark space by a distant light and call/song/chant, we find that the source of the potentially comforting human presence is perpetually veiled and beyond reach. The work is, as the artist puts it, is "a construction of longing," an attempt to give form to an inherently compelling yet elusive emotion.

Lisa Steele + Kim Tomczak's video, "We're getting younger all the time," is perhaps the most confrontational work in the exhibition. This video portrait of the two artists asks us to engage their gaze and

experience their fragile humanity as they silently breathe, blink and twitch the seconds away. The effect here is strangely unsettling, as we are confronted with the transient nature of human life as it slips from moment to moment. We also must face the reality that no lasting document of these moments can compensate for their relentless passage.

Stephanie Ashenfelder's sculptures offer a timely comment on war—both the current conflict in Iraq and other, more quotidian conflicts. The artists' statement on "The Prosthetics of War" reflects the diversity of such struggles: "we are fighting for freedom... we are fighting mold and mildew... we are fighting Internet spam." The forms Ashenfelder interprets to represent this panoply of wars are the jet fighter and helicopter. Ashenfelder abstracts these "prosthetics" of war and covers them with bright floral wallpaper, tying the forms to the domestic sphere, and to more universal concerns.

Finally, to complete a viewing of the Buffalo Arts Studio exhibition, one must venture out to Main Street near the Tri-Main building; Corrine Carlson's "Billboard" is hard to miss. Carlson has appropriated the context and materials—in this case, the dazzling mega-sequins of reflectolite—to fire a message at the audience with mass media intensity. The message, however, belies its intense delivery; a single, onomatopoeic word, "Baa," confronts the viewer with a jarring reminder of the sheep-like behavior in which he or she is momentarily engaged.

—eric jackson-forsberg

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