

Summer's show shines in January

By HELEN ZUCKER

If you've a case of the winter blahs, the perfect antidote is the Carol Summers show at the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum.

This artist works with rich, vibrant colors. His extraordinary woodcuts transport the viewer to a world of witty outdoor shapes. The lush colors, and even the titles, "Waterfall," "Warrens," "The Big Horn at Night," "Rocky Mountains" and "Comet," will lift your spirits immeasurably.

Summers isn't merely witty—his works have an uncanny affinity to shapes you see in dreams—on a night when your dreams are friendly. His woodcuts remind one of the freshness of nature. Seeing Summers' work for the first time is like stepping into a clearing in the woods, recognizable, yet new.

"Out of my hands roll surprises, histories, enigmas," said Summers in his artist's statement—a fair statement of what most artists would like to do, and what he manages to achieve. He uses Japanese paper, a process called "rubbing," and a variety of techniques within the woodcut medium. Undulating color fields are what he tries for, and gets.

THE EARLIEST WORKS in the show are from the '50s. Already an accomplished artist, Summers worked with more subdued colors then. The designs of Summers' '20s and '30s are a blend of Scandinavian-Indian patterns, a look that was faintly avant-garde during the early '50s, and became widely accepted as the decade wore on. By 1960 you could find an Indian bedspread in every department store and college dorm in the country.

Summers' early works, bridges and city scenes, are whimsical, never cloying, and sprightly. "Fontana," is like a sensuous Steinberg. Flashes of Braque, Miro, and Stuart Davis add to the play of wit.

"HUDSON RIVER SUNSET," 1968, is particularly wonderful. Lush blues, graduating from light to Prussian, delineate the water, a pyramid (a shape much used by Summers), and round shapes underneath the bridge. A crayoned sky of child-orange is exactly right. He uses the cream parchment color of his paper to complete his woodcut.

"Aetna Alive," 1964, is all palpitating hearts and funnels—a New Yorker cover carried to its height.

"Palm Tree," 1964, is stunning with ripe cherry leaves, a yellow sky,

Review

orange leaves, a cranberry-colored trunk. The landscape flows around this palm in violets and blues.

"Rocky Mountains," 1968, has red, orange, and violet trails snaking upward through blue and purple boulders. The mountains look bulky, concrete, immense and cheerful at the same time.

"Dream of Constantine," 1969, draws together the pyramid, rainbow, flowing-water, and circular shapes Summers is so fond of. He makes a singular woodcut out of the combination.

Summers gets better and better as the more-or-less chronologically ordered show of 143 woodcuts progresses.

"Navarro Ridge," 1973, marks a big change. Outlines grow sharper and colors even more intense, especially blues that darken to near black, purples, violets and cranberry. Thick violets and blues were Summers' hallmark until the very recent "Navarro

Sunset," 1973, and "California," 1977. His latest work is his boldest.

Summers is a prolific artist. He has taken a consistent imagery and carried it over a long period. He grows richer with the years. He is an artist whose lush colors engage the eye, and whose comely forms engage the spirit on a deep and satisfying level.

With the exception of the Matisse show at The Detroit Institute, the Carol Summers exhibit is the liveliest, most sumptuous exhibit I've seen this winter. Even the catalogue, put together by Gene Baro, consultative curator of prints and drawings at the Brooklyn Museum, is sumptuous.

The show has been organized by The Brooklyn Museum. Summers both studied and taught at the Brooklyn, and they own a good many of his woodcuts.

Summers has had 15 one-man exhibitions at museums and noted galleries here and abroad. His work can be found in museums from Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and India to New York and Boston.

The show travels to Boston from Cranbrook. It runs through Feb. 19. The museum is open 1-5 p.m., Tues.-Sun.

Carol Summers' wit comes through in his "Portrait of D.M."

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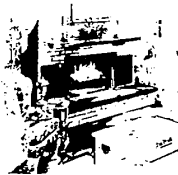


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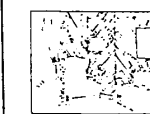


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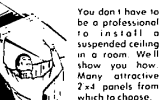
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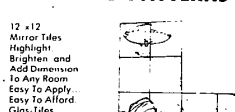
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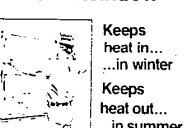
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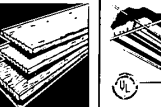
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