

Good selection awaits art buffs

By HELEN ZUCKER

There's a tremendous amount of good art around town this month.

AT THE LEE HOFFMAN GALLERY, Edward Giobbi's work is being shown. The artist from Katonah, N.Y., has charm. He has high spirits, and his work is an amalgam of fresh dabs, licks, and exquisite squares of richly colored paint caught within shapes we are all accustomed to looking at for centuries.

Giobbi has the sweet audacity to put his "spring fever" paintings inside folding diptychs, triptychs, arches, and even conceivable altar shape. He also creates whitewashed walls and proceeds to give us frescoes and abstract use of color at one and the same time.

I liked the blithe, mixed media, Hans-Hoffman-like diptychs, the recent "Untitled 1977" series of panels in sets of three—an old, religious concept—and a "Study For A Large Painting, 1976," done in pastels and mixed media, best. Square color-field stripes, surrounded by intricate, tiny patterns floating off into the upper registers of the canvas give the work the mysterious feel of a cave painting carried to the heights of sophistication. The whole is outlined in white, as if to re-enforce the complexities within.

THE WORKS ON VIEW ARE SMALL and highly original. The large paintings, based on these smaller versions, must be impressive.

Giobbi was born in Connecticut, and educated at the Art Student's League in New York and the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, Italy.

He has works at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., the Tate Gallery in London, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Whitney Museum in New York, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Giobbi, who has digested both New York and Florence and made use of his dual heritage in his paintings, has written a cookbook called "Italian Family Cooking." His friend, Craig Claiborne, has written the introduction. The cover picture of an

immaculate, beautifully equipped kitchen with Giobbi and his wife in the center, above the red peppers, gives us an insight into what his studio must look like. One can almost picture him licking dabs of paint... as he works.

The show runs through June 6. Lee Hoffman Gallery is at 538 N. Woodward. Hours are Tuesday-Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

AT SUSANNE HILBERRY GALLERY, Alex Katz has a group of large paintings, and a collection of the cut-outs he's been doing since 1959.

Some of the latter are meant to simply hang on a wall, others to stand inside a wooden base of the kind we used to put paper dolls in as children. Born in 1927 in New York, Katz went to Cooper Union and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. He has received Achievement citation. Katz, an integral part of the New York art scene, has lived through pop, and, while taking from and giving to the movements of the '50s and the '60s, has kept his faith in the human figure, and lived to take his figures through New Realism and out beyond the glossy surface of advertising art.

Katz, whose major concern seems to be scale, recently finished a 247-foot by 20-foot frieze of celebrities' faces atop 1481 Broadway, on the corner of Seventh Avenue and Forty-Second Street.

The thousands of people who pass the old RKO building every day can crane their necks and see an enormous Katz "sign" gussying up the city. Though Katz, after hassling with the city, that commissioned the work, nearly wound up paying for the sign himself. I can think of a lot better uses New York—and Katz—could have put the money to.

A MAN OF TREMENDOUS technical achievement, Katz is into something fundamentally dangerous to art. He is too involved with the lifestyles of the people who stalk through "New Yorker" ads.

Where is art meant for students learning to look, for people who like art, who are nourished by it? It is the

business of art to reach out to as wide an audience as possible, to gather in the past, transmute it, and pass it on to the future. It is not the business of art to be so tied to the small minority that make up the world of high fashion and/or celebrities.

Katz blows these people out of scale. Everything he paints these days, beautiful, buffed, and polished though it may be, is essentially modeled, self-conscious, aware that it is art with a capital A.

A PAINTING OF KATZ'S WIFE Ada, drinking coffee, catches her looking coyly over the rim of her cup. Her eyes seem to say, "Are you catching me for publication?"

A painting of critic Carter Ratcliff lighting Phyllis Diller's cigarette, blows Ratcliff into the proportions of Superman. What is the man doing? He's lighting a woman's cigarette, he's not engaged in the burning of Carthage.

In Katz's portrait of his mother sunning, as in "Hexagonal Scarf," the emphasis is on what appears to be a Halston scarf.

Even the sand is designer colored. True, at first glance, Katz's mother looks extremely happy, sunning away in her chair. On closer examination, however, she doesn't look like anyone's mother. She's a strangely unwrinkled, elderly lady on a sun deck—a model.

So is Katz's son, swimming in the smooth waters of a lake. The planes of green, blue, and sun-warmed ochre are faultless. The smooth water reflects the propeller and oars under a broadbark canoe. The same son rowing alone in a world of merged sea and

sky he seems to own, is somehow off center.

We should smell the sea, hear the gulls. Instead the beaches are littered with Oscar de la Renta sunglasses, and the gulls have been sent off to zoos run by Neiman Marcus.

Katz has works at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Fogg Art Museum, the Detroit Institute, the Metropolitan Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis, and in museums here and abroad.

The show at the Hilberry runs through May 31. Hours are 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

Carla Croker, who runs ARTISAN'S UNLIMITED, 860 Bowers, in the Courtyard, has oils by Mary Town. Ms. Town, a local artist is the youngest woman artist to have a feature done on her by "American Artist" magazine.

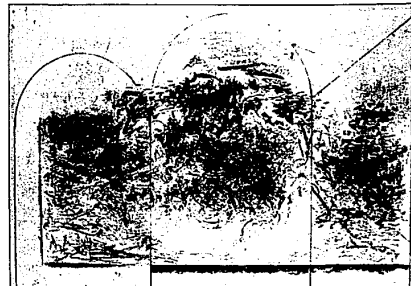
The May 1978 issue carries wonderful color reproductions of her work as well as her comments on how it was done. "American Artist" excels in explaining the technical aspects of making art and is read religiously by artists who want to be aware of new techniques, new materials and new laws.

MS. TOWN, JUST TURNED 30, has recently leaped into control of her medium. It is a pleasure to look at her "Zinnias," "Marigolds and Astors," "Forsythia Bushes," and "Views From My Garden."

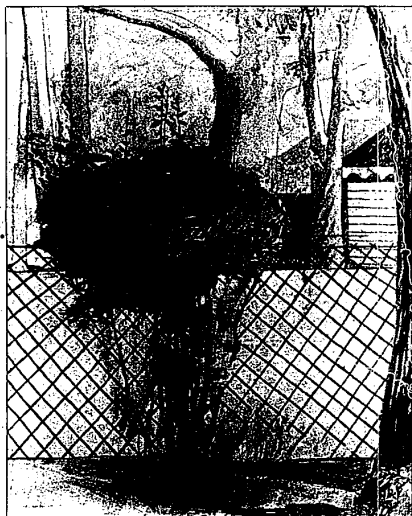
She handles a subject that is generally the stuff of sentiment with a hard, clean, pure sense of color, and a sense



"The Light" by Alex Katz is part of a one-man show at the Susanne Hilberry Gallery.



This work by Edward Giobbi at Lee Hoffman Gallery is a study for a larger work.



Mary Town's oil of a familiar scene is done in the broad strokes characteristic of this local artist. (Staff photos by Stephen Cantrell)

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