

Meadowbrook Gallery showcases area artists

By HELEN ZUCKER

"Return of Realism, Part II: Detroit Realists" at the Meadow Brook Gallery is a superb show. It's not really a return, rather an advance in a movement that began in the post-pop period.

Realism is a rather large, vague word meaning anything artists want it to mean at a particular moment in time. The concept of New Realism started out in the 1960s with crude, funny, hominoid works like Larry Stark's "Crossing the USA Biting MacDonald's All The Way," featuring huge, hazy blowups of French fries. As this was followed by Chuck Close's 10-foot paintings of his own bemused face, Richard Estes' hard, glittering paintings of airfields and storefronts, and Gregory Gillespie's extraordinary, realistic portraits filled with Bosch-like passion.

Finding conceptualism left no room to turn around in—let alone a canvas to paint on. Many artists since then have leaped into the realist arena with relief.

Realism is a wide-open field. The school isn't really a return to the Dutch still life, as many critics have claimed. It's simply a willing return on the part of artists to the world they live in, a desire to deal with the objects they see daily, to use paint and the tools of their trade.

And, perhaps all this is based on the sneaky feeling that engineering alone isn't art. Ideas and feelings expressed in any old way aren't art. And TV monitors, while intriguing, can only do

so much, can only give us flip ideas about time and its passage that we all know intuitively.

ART IS ABOUT BELIEF, and it is made out of images—images created by people with depth of feeling, things to say, and a knowledge of their craft. The fakers leave the arena at this point.

After all, George Grosz left us immortal war records with nothing more than charcoal and newspaper; it was how to draw and what to leave out. He knew how to order what he saw, and in that ordering lies the basis of making art.

New Realism has moved on from the crazy exactitudes of grid painting. Roughly speaking, this technique involves blowing up a photo, squaring it into grids, copying the grids onto canvas, then transferring a duplicate of the photo onto canvas in acrylics or oils. What you get is photo-realism.

The paintings currently on view at Meadow Brook Gallery have left photography. The artists involved have struck out in search of mood, atmosphere, comment, a rough positivism. It's okay to be charming again. I have a sigh of relief at this development. It's high time that nutty era when everything was art and everyone was an artist departed.

The Meadow Brook show is comprised of local talent chosen from 200 submissions. Curator Kichi Usui, exhibition committee members, and

Prof. Charlotte Stokes put together this impressive display. It's all high quality.

OF THE 14 ARTISTS represented, I particularly liked Robert Gniwew. Gniwew is Detroit's answer to Edward Hopper. His empty streets and the old "Colonial Theatre" with its blank marquee jutting out from the brooding building behind it are mournful, poetic portraits of a city he loves.

The brown street is lined with mailboxes no one uses, abandoned storefronts are filled with memories of busier days. "Greek Pastry Shop" is Greektown on a sunny day. Old or new realism, or whatever, it's a fine painting. Gniwew loves streets and is a true recorder of what is happening or not happening on Detroit's streets right now. This is what painting is all about.

I also liked Michael Jackson's subtle oil, "A Corner Radiator." Blues bounce off blue-greens. A window barely seen casts shadows on an opposite wall. The radiator itself lies in shadow. It's a haunting work. There are several variations on the radiator, and "Self Portrait."

Jackson sees himself as a slim, young man taking a rather dim view of himself in an oval-shaped mirror over a porcelain table. The table reappears in another painting with a blue chess clock on it. In the "Self Portrait," the drawer of this table is

open, revealing colored boxes. The chess clock is still there, the floorboards are visible, and one imagines Jackson dragging his beloved table across the room to paint it once again, since the electric outlet visible in the first painting is absent in "Self Portrait."

Obsessions with objects, and the geometry of objects is a common motif in this show. Jackson manages to get the most out of radiators and tables.

Sharon Weiss does a lot with three eggs in "Ova II." The cracked shells are lovingly painted in delicate shades, pinks, lemons. The yolks seem like the first breakfast eggs broken open on a sunny Sunday morning. Ms. Weiss, who likes edibles, has a fine study of a peach in pastels. The pit in "Just Peachy" looks as edible as the fruit. A sense of humor is a nice thing to run into, and Ms. Weiss exhibits humor along with fine craftsmanship.

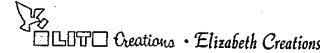
on clothes and walls abound in his charming works.

Mel Rosas doesn't see the world as a place of warmth and charm. His "Utility Closet" is kin to a room in a James Baldwin story. You can touch and smell the pipes in his charcoal and acrylic works. "Double Utility" is a diptych of laundry sinks. The work hoses in on every stain, every leaky pipe dripping on the smeared floor. Still in the sink business, Rosas moves on the "Sink With Foreign Elements," an acrylic that uses color. Rosas has spent a lot of time studying sinks.

Every detail of every basement sink I have ever seen is finely rendered here.

Patricia Quinlan's portraits are wonderful. "Gordon McClelland" sits in a canvas chair under a green arch. Somehow McClelland seems made of canvas, too. All is bold, wry, rough-edged, good to look at.

The show runs through Dec. 20. Meadow Brook Gallery is located on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester. Hours are 1-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays.



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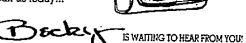
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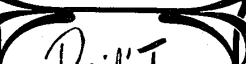
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