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## Funk ceramics — playing little games



MINY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

Former Birmingham resident, sculptor John Aaron, creates street scenes in ceramics as a form of historic preservation to help his viewers appreciate a variety of architectural styles.

By Sarah E. McNeal  
special writer

Xochipilli Gallery's show of ceramics by John Aaron brightens the local art scene. Funk ceramics in the Midwest is as welcome as lobster would be in the Great Lakes.

Aaron, now living in Boulder, Colo., originally from the Detroit area, received his bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of Michigan.

He studied in California and came in contact with several artists of the Funk school, primarily Robert Arneson.

The Funk school broke radically from the traditional vessel form. The work is usually humorous, sacrilegious in nature, and generally made for shock effect. Essentially the artists go against the norm, the accepted practices of art.

Ceramic pieces in this realm are highly contextual as opposed to dealing in sculptural elements.

A subject almost always associated with Aaron's work is dogs — particularly Labrador retrievers.

PARODY and play on images characterize Aaron's work. All of his dog pieces poke fun at people by making human situations, dog situations.

As an artist Aaron pursued ceramics because "it was a three-dimensional way to make funny comments," he said.

Aaron is a master at the visual pun. The classic examples are his RCA Victor dogs. A dog, who should be listening to a Victrola, has it instead for a snout.

His moderately priced pieces are like little dog sitcoms.

They are "one-liners" . . . a dose of the Sunday funnies," as Aaron put it.

Also apparent is Aaron's interest in architecture which he said stems from time spent in cities such as San Francisco and Chicago. Of par-

ticular interest to him is historical preservation. Some of his architectural ceramic works with strong preservation statements are scaled down replicas of major historic sights which function as three-dimensional murals.

AARON finds using ceramics to accomplish architectural renderings as natural.

"Most of the historic buildings are made of brick, which is clay . . . making them less contrived," says Aaron.

His plates "Renaissance" and the sequenced "Dinner," "Drinks," and "More Drinks" at the Jerome, (which are three separate pieces), are exactly what one might think, they are like plates bought on a trip as souvenirs.

"The same idea, hand tailored, 'I was there' . . . and they have silly details going on," said Aaron.

"Renaissance" is Aaron's architectural piece for Detroit, but the series of the Jerome Hotel and the remarkable large "mural" the "Jerome" are the most impressive.

In Aspen the Jerome is a very popular luxury hotel that is being renovated.

Aaron has given a slightly wide angle lens view and plays on the nostalgia of the building. He has made the Jerome Hotel unique by breathing new life into it, adding charm and mystique that gives allure to the past.

Technically Aaron pushes his medium to the limits. Despite all the fun and games, his work has grown in craftsmanship. Now it is less cluttered than some of the earlier works. Attention to detail and glazes certainly give the works validity.

The show, appropriately named "Urban Spice," lets the viewer see the treasure of old buildings with fresh vision. The show runs through April 14.

Xochipilli Art Gallery is at 568 N. Woodward Ave. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

## All aboard

## Link's trained eye catches steam locomotives

By Ira Lax  
special writer

The bygone era of steam locomotives and 1950s rural Americana are given homage in the photographs of O. Winston Link, on exhibit now through April 14 at the Pierce Street Gallery.

For over a century after the Civil War the transcontinental railroads and connecting trunk lines were the main form of transportation for America's agricultural and industrial products.

Wherever tracks were laid towns sprang up to serve as shipping and supply centers which in turn were connected to the larger urban markets.

Thus, names like the Union Pacific, Great Northern, and Atchafalaya, Topeka and Santa Fe led a dynamic process of expansion and unification throughout most of the century.

Out of this century emerged a railroad culture and a railroad landscape which was symbolized most graphically by the sights and sounds of the steam powered locomotive.

O. WINSTON Link, a New York industrial photographer, who grew up in Brooklyn in the 1920s, was always fascinated by trains and bridges. While on assignment in Staunton, Virginia in 1955, Link took the time to document the night arrival of a Norfolk & Western steam engine at nearby Waynesboro.

At that time, the Norfolk & Western was the only railroad in the country that hadn't begun making the switch to diesel engines.

With this in mind, and inspired by his initial shot at Waynesboro, Link decided to devote the next five years to recording on film and audio tape the landscape of the steam engine before it was gone.

Link rode the 2,500 miles of N & W track throughout Virginia taking meticulous notes as he visualized his project.

Most of the shots were to be taken at night, using a 4 by 5 Graphic View camera, and hundreds of feet of electrical cable linking an intricate system of battery-powered synchronized flash units.

Link traveled with one assistant in his '52 Buick convertible, pulling a portable darkroom in a U-Haul trailer.

Every trick he had learned over years of doing shots for the annual reports of America's largest companies would be put to use in this labor of love.

Link had the cooperation of the management and workers of the N & W, as well as many generous individuals along the way.

THE CENTRAL character of the photographs is, of course, the steam engine, but it is cleverly placed in the context of the people and small towns of Virginia, appearing often on the periphery and sometimes center stage.

Three town elders sit chatting on their summer porch while the train rolls by behind them, practically unnoticed, yet known.

In a cozy living room scene composed of a mother, her young son, cat and dog, the steam engine we see

framed by the back widow could be a clever night painting if it were not for the boy waving at it.

Or in another, the dairy farmer and his son are returning their cows to the barn along a mud path, between wooden fences. A tall silo looms up high and the steam powered train snakes past toward tomorrow.

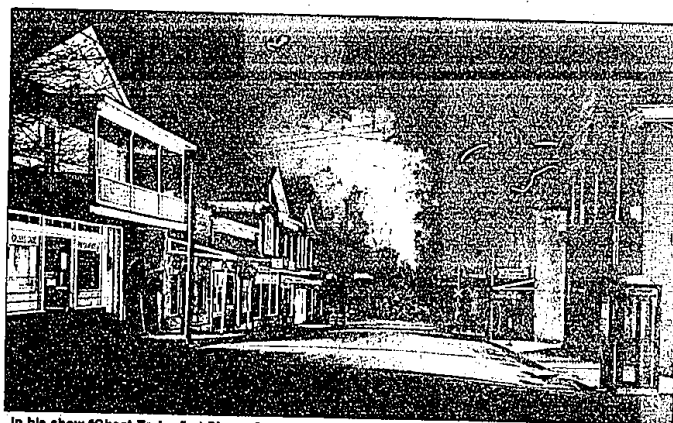
In another, a man and boy stand awestruck, facing the approaching spectacle of the smoking "Peachbottom Westbound," speeding out of a mountain tunnel, possibly for the last time.

At night small towns close down and, except for the bars, are waiting for movement or noise. Two of the photographs have a surreal quality, showing the steam engine rolling, like a large prehistoric animal into the dead sleep of Main Street USA.

Link also captures a slice of life at the general store, where townspeople come for supplies and to visit. Although no train appears, the walls and shelves are full of the products the train brings — the new cool smoke of Salem cigarettes, Stanback for headaches, brand names like Morton, Ace, Universal, Bug Boy, Wetsel Seeds, and Hershey's chocolate syrup in gallon tins.

IN ANOTHER uniquely photographic moment, Link literally captures drive-in movie goers parked in 1950s convertibles, watching a twin-engine plane on celluloid as a soon-to-be-scraped steam locomotive whistles by.

The prints are large (18 by 20), and luminous. The rich black and white



In his show, "Ghost Trains," at Pierce Street Gallery, photographer O. Winston Link puts the steam locomotive into its true context in the American scene — a moving life line.

tones and the incredible lighting of these night landscapes reflect the care of a master craftsman. Everything is honestly and openly staged, showing paths and even humor for the people and the vanishing trains.

O. Winston Link has given us his vision of the landscape of the steam powered locomotive. These are strong, clean images, full of interesting details.

Marcia Bosman, co-owner of Pierce

St., said, Link "will be viewed as a major photographer."

The gallery is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday and is upstairs at 217 Pierce, Birmingham.

By Ruth Zaromp  
special writer

The Amici Musicae presented its third and final program for this year's series at the Soarab Club on Sunday. Organized by area harpsichord player Evelyn Scheyer, it proved to be exciting and intriguing.

Included were two works by Albinoni as well as compositions by Pugnani, Benedetto Marcello, Prokofiev and Schmitt.

Albinoni's Sonata for Two Violins, Cello and Harpsichord in B Flat Major, his first piece on the program, is composed of four movements, a slow movement, a fast fugue, a slow movement and a fast fugue. It came out basically well with the fugues portraying all of the voices in a well-formulated manner.

Next was Gaetano Pugnani's Sonata in E Major for Violin and Harpsichord. Pugnani, an Italian composer, lived from 1731-1798. This obscure composer was immortalized by a Kreisler piece based on his style.

The first movement of the sonata, a slow one, was very melodic. The second fast movement fea-

tures a brilliant, technically demanding allegro, which violinist Alvin Score pulled off impressively, even though some notes were knocked off in the process.

ALTHOUGH this sonata was basically well read, it lacked the depth that could come with more work.

Benedetto Marcello's (1686-1739) Sonata Number 1 for Cello and Harpsichord was played by John Thurman, cello, and Evelyn Scheyer, harpsichord. Here, the beauty of the cello playing was very noticeable, the lyricism of the tonalities created a feeling of euphoria and inner peace.

Following intermission there were two modern selections. The first, by Sergei Prokofiev, was his Sonata Opus 56 for two violins. It's dissonant style, common by today's standards, was innovative at the time the piece was written. One could observe a modern severity within the contrasting themes.

Prokofiev skillfully used counterpoint and polyphonic technique in this piece. It was ably played by Alvin Score and Robert Murphy with accurate renditions of different parts as well as the creation of a feeling of togetherness.

In contrast, the Sonatine on Trio, Opus 85 for

Flute, Clarinet, and Harpsichord by Florent Schmitt, (French composer, 1870-1955), was extremely different in its tonalities. With only three years difference in the time of composition (Schmitt was written in 1935 whereas Prokofiev wrote his in 1932), there was no feeling of stonality and dissonance in Schmitt's work.

PERFORMED by Saul Ben-Meir, flute, and Lawrence Liberson, clarinet, it created a positive, bright, spring-like feeling with a beautiful vitality more like the earlier days of classicism and romanticism.

Florent Schmitt, who isn't played very often, wrote some beautiful as well as difficult music. Scheyer should be complimented for programming the enjoyable work.

Gaetano Albinoni's Sonata for Two Violins, Cello and Harpsichord in C Major, sounded even more beautiful than his first sonata.

The first two movements were similar to the first sonata, with a slow movement and a fast fugue, but the third movement (grave) portrayed a dialogue between the two violins, each complementing the other. The last fast movement finished with a very positive tone and provided a fitting end to an unusual program.

## Season closes on a high note

review