

Exploring 3 Mediums

By HELEN A. HARRISON

THE current exhibition at the Primavera Gallery in Huntington features three young artists using very different means to achieve personal modes of expression, yet the show is surprisingly harmonious.

Its particular interest lies in the juxtaposition of sensibilities that invites consideration of why an artist chooses a particular medium as well as the results achieved by each.

Amy F. Levine is a painter in the tradition of the Fauves and European Expressionists, who explored the emotional possibilities of color, texture and form. Her work represents the opposite technical extreme to that of Nancy Paternoster, whose computer and video imagery is mechanically created. Lynn Bermont, a sculptor, is concerned with primeval forms inspired by nature, but abstracted into ambiguous structures that seem not to be man-made at all.

In spite of the lack of any common esthetic ground, these artists complement each other to a surprising degree. All three have chosen to forego the depiction of outward appearance, to reach beyond the limits of representation, in order to express meaning on a more basic level.

Miss Paternoster, the first female graduate of Syracuse University's computer graphics program, uses up-to-the-minute technology, yet she conceives of her efforts as analogous to the primitive scratchings on cave walls. Her eight-minute videotape, "Questioning Mediumz," traces the development of man's image-making

urge from these prehistoric beginnings, concluding that each technical advance merely provides more sophisticated means of achieving the same ends.

To her, the value of technology lies not in its inherent qualities, but rather in its expansion of expressive options. Miss Paternoster's work affirms the artist's touch as the essential element in creativity.

In contrast to the uniform, smooth finish of Miss Paternoster's images, Miss Levine's canvases are heavily impastoed, almost sculptural in their

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modeling of paint and use of applied textures. The differences in their approaches are obvious, yet each questions her chosen medium by examining its inherent character and manipulating it to her own esthetic ends.

Miss Levine is also concerned with human emotion — in her case, the tension and isolation of individuals. Even in groups, her figures are self-contained and inward-looking, as if conscious of their personal vulnerability. In motion and in repose, they are animated by forceful brushwork that highlights the inner agitation.

This symbolic, allusive treatment of the figure is hardly new to the annals of painting, yet it was once viewed with as much skepticism as computer art is today. By emphasizing the medium itself so forcefully, the artist endows it with a presence equal to that of the characters it describes. Unnaturally vibrant color, often harsh and rasping, makes the

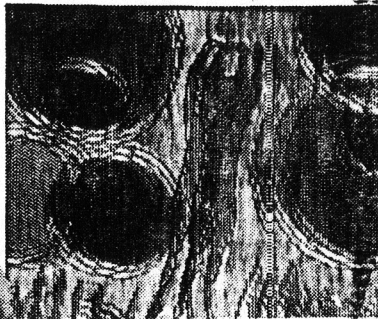
work even more subjective, until we realize that we are looking not at people but into them.

Such psychological probing is a hallmark of Expressionism, but there are other means of stripping away surface appearance to get at the essence of being. Miss Bermont uses an even more radical reductivism, creating primal presences that seem to exist outside of time.

Her sculptures, made of wire wrapped in plaster-coated bandages, suggest life forms that might be animal or vegetable or even some strange combination of the two. Their rugged surfaces are painted in somber, earthy colors that enhance their



From top right, "Study of a Transparent Dancer," by Nancy Paternoster, sculpture by Lynn Bermont, and "Focus" by Amy F. Levine



feeling of natural origin, in spite of their lack of reference to specific forms in nature.

Again it appears that the artist has chosen a vehicle that allows her a maximum of personal expressive freedom, rather than one that is inherently attractive and acceptable. In Miss Bermont's case especially, her material is both emphatically what it is and undeniably something else again. An empty vessel, titled "No Passion," illustrates this ambiguity. Its withered, husklike folds evoke a pod from which a seed of life has long since been released. In "Bird of Appetite II," two spindly shapes confront each other in what could be interpreted as a mating ritual, or perhaps a duel to the death.

Whether the medium is traditional or unorthodox, time-tested or innovative, in the final analysis it is the artist who determines its creative validity. In this show, vigor and imagination go a long way to proving that expression is limited only by the scope of the artist's vision.

The exhibition will be on view through Dec. 8. The gallery, at 196 Spring Road, is open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 11 to 6 P.M., and by appointment. The telephone number is 423-6394.