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The Arts



At SPA, a taste of the New York art scene

By Anne Galloway
TIMES ARGUS STAFF

The inveterate collector Mark Waskow has brought a taste of the New York art scene to Barre with the exhibition, "Becoming Contemporary Masters?" at Studio Place Arts through Sept. 10. All of the work in the show is contemporary, and it's so cutting edge that the artists are complete unknowns, for now. Whether the central Vermont art community is ready for a dollop of presumably soon-to-be, big-time art, is anyone's guess.

The seven artists in the show have a lot of talent and no name recognition – yet. Waskow went to an avant garde incubator – the School for the Visual Arts – to get this particular roomful of spicy takeout. The artists are candidates in the master's of fine arts program at the exclusive arts school in New York City. For every 30 to 35 MFA program

Studio Place Arts

Three simultaneous exhibitions – paintings by Ethan Azarian, paintings and drawings by Robert Brunelle and "Becoming Contemporary Masters?" – are on view at Studio Place Arts in Barre through Sept. 10. The opening reception is 6 to 8 p.m. tonight. An informal discussion with the artists begins at 8 p.m.

The gallery, located at 201 N. Main St., is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and noon to 4 p.m. Saturday. For more information, go online to www.studioplacearts.com, or call 479-7069.

openings, there are 3,000 applicants.

Waskow has whittled a select group of 32 MFA candidates down even further for "Becoming Contemporary Masters?", the show he curated for SPA.

And that's just the first floor line up at the gallery. Waskow also curated the acrylic "wall-paper" and ghoulish, "Goodnight Moon" style paintings by Ethan Azarian on the second floor. Cartoonist and

art teacher Robert Brunelle's genre paintings and drawings are the featured solo exhibit on the third floor.

"Becoming Contemporary Masters?" is cold comfort for the viewer who wants to see pretty Vermont landscapes. This show is for viewers who enjoy being challenged by art. That isn't to say, however, that the work is inaccessible or alienating; many of the pieces have an enigmatically childlike quality.

While the 20- to 40-something artists in "Becoming Contemporary Masters?" use traditional media – oil paint, charcoal, drawing, gouache, photography – they all express a nontraditional, highly developed sense of irony, and a general dissatisfaction with the way the world is, with the impersonal nature of society and the disconnectedness they feel. The work is by turns in-your-face cynical, mystically poetic and inexplicable.

Adam Krueger's phallic image, "No, My Bike Is Not Purple," is a surrealist painting of a man's face. A hand emerges from his open mouth. His first two fingers are crossed, and the forefinger is in the shape of a penis. The background is a childish landscape with a tree, cloud and tulips. A token sun is stuck in the corner, radiating yellow dashes. "Normalization" is another

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Stefan Hard/Times Argus

Detail from "Normalization" by Adam Krueger

SPA

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surreal offering from Krueger. A hyper-realistic, oversized image of a woman's face in shades of blue with a psychedelic '70s flower foreground in green, pink and orange. A red balloon dangles like an earring from the center with a piece of string that falls to the floor. A hand materializes out of nowhere near the face, rubbing cloud dust over all.

In "8%\$*\$4\$*(9%?" Krueger has created an enormous trompe l'oeil painting that looks like a blue-lined sheet of spiral bound notebook paper that's been doodled on in pencil. It's meticulously detailed. There are notes to self, "card for mother," for example, and crudely drawn images of a rocket, a nose, a row of breasts, a naked girl and a money sign. Each circle torn away from the spiral binding has been painted accurately, and beyond the edge is a painting in blue and yellow.

Tim Clifford's images are somber studies of place rendered in charcoal, ink and gouache. In his "Color Belongs to the Past" series blank bill boards are placed in the foreground of field of blank white paper. His other images link drawings of neighborhoods to formalized arrangements of geometric shapes.

At first it would appear that Dylan Mortimer is making fun of religiosity in his series of street installations. Mortimer placed props – a prayer bench or a pulpit fashioned from a caution sign with the phrase, "Sermon occurring on other side," on the street and photographed these "installations" with people praying or sermonizing. As it turns out, none of this is tongue in cheek. Mortimer is a devout Catholic who is trying to communicate his feelings about faith.

Jed Rederer sees himself as a dead man. In "Self Portrait as Martyr" he has painted himself on a steel morgue table wrapped in a white sheet. Two paramilitary personnel stand at the end of the table, and a portrait has been propped up nearby, of whom, we don't know. It could be a dictator, or Rederer himself.

Jae Kwoun Youn has cut out abstract shapes in pads of paper and telephone books to create



"Etude for Project III" by Jae-Kwoun Youn

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relief sculptures. "IMG 0290" is an altered telephone book that looks like a tongue projecting from the wall, while "Etude for Project III" is a rectangular shape cut out of a 500-sheet pad of sketch paper that flops forward like a head of hair reeling forward in slow motion. Each page is visible; together they form an elegant shape of movement.

Waskow doesn't characterize the work in "Becoming Contemporary Masters?" as realistic or abstract; he says that all of the work shares an ironic intent that he believes has become more omnipresent in the art world over the last 10 years. He calls it the "new irony," an artistic response to the helplessness people feel about the impersonal nature of society.

Waskow sees the show as an opportunity to expose Vermont artists to national caliber mod-



"Apples and Oranges" by Robert Brunelle

ern art. "It's important to see work from within the belly of the beast, within the cultural continuum ... for people in the arts to figure out how it relates to their work," he says.

Waskow is something of an expert on the subject. He's the manager and founder of The Waskowium, a quasi-public collection of more than 7,000 pieces of contemporary art work, which he says is the largest archive of its type in Vermont. This year he is also curating the South End Art Hop in Burlington and Sculptfest 2005 in West Rutland. He makes frequent art-buying trips to New York, and SPA has been on his radar for some time.

"Good" art, in Waskow's book has "us asking questions of ourselves." By that definition, "Becoming Contemporary Masters?" is a "good" show.

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