

SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2005

Art of the Northeast: New threads or faded glory?

Continued from F1

connect-the-dots roadmap to artistic prowess with degrees and training at Rhode Island School of Design, School of Visual Arts, The New York Studio School and the New York Academy of Art. No wonder the lassitude of the prone subject reflects a synthetic understanding of figuration orbiting around Fairfield Porter and Eric Fischl. This is the type of "jewel in the rough" that young collectors start acquiring during their salad days. It's the "real deal."

A quintessentially suburban malaise akin to John Updike's literary voice pours through Michele Katen's (Hartford) "Yellow Lounge Chair" oil painting. Lusciously applied broadbrushed indigo blues and lawn greens thrust obliquely across the cavernous edge of an in-ground swimming pool.

The oh-so dated '50s roofline and curtain wall pane-less windows are appropriate backdrops for three faceless, alienated figures. Meanwhile, just up Wisteria Lane, we see a cocktail party replete with vicious conversation and ladies in pink garments in Florence Keveson's (Bronx) social clique.

And speaking of retro-'50s Hollywood raking light, don't miss Miggs Burroughs' (Westport) eye-blinking double-take.

The "lenticular" optical effect allows the viewer to see a pearl-throated blonde trapped in a Hitchcock freeze-frame; and then we shift a few feet and this Kim Novak-like bombshell's buttocks crack reveals a Celtic tattoo spelling out "Lucky." Who's the model? Cindy Sherman?

The auto-erotic exhibitionism is less successful in Monica Church's (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.) teasing set of 13 gleece prints. The fishnet stockings and hardened nipples slip over the line into a soft-porn charade of feminist empowerment. It's so "in your face" that any claim of "male gazing" becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Elizabeth Winchester (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.) maps out a richly veined color field. Wildly spilled color oozes off the edges of this triptych; cartographic details creating a NASA satellite view of topographic regions from the Bavarian Alps to the San Andreas Fault.

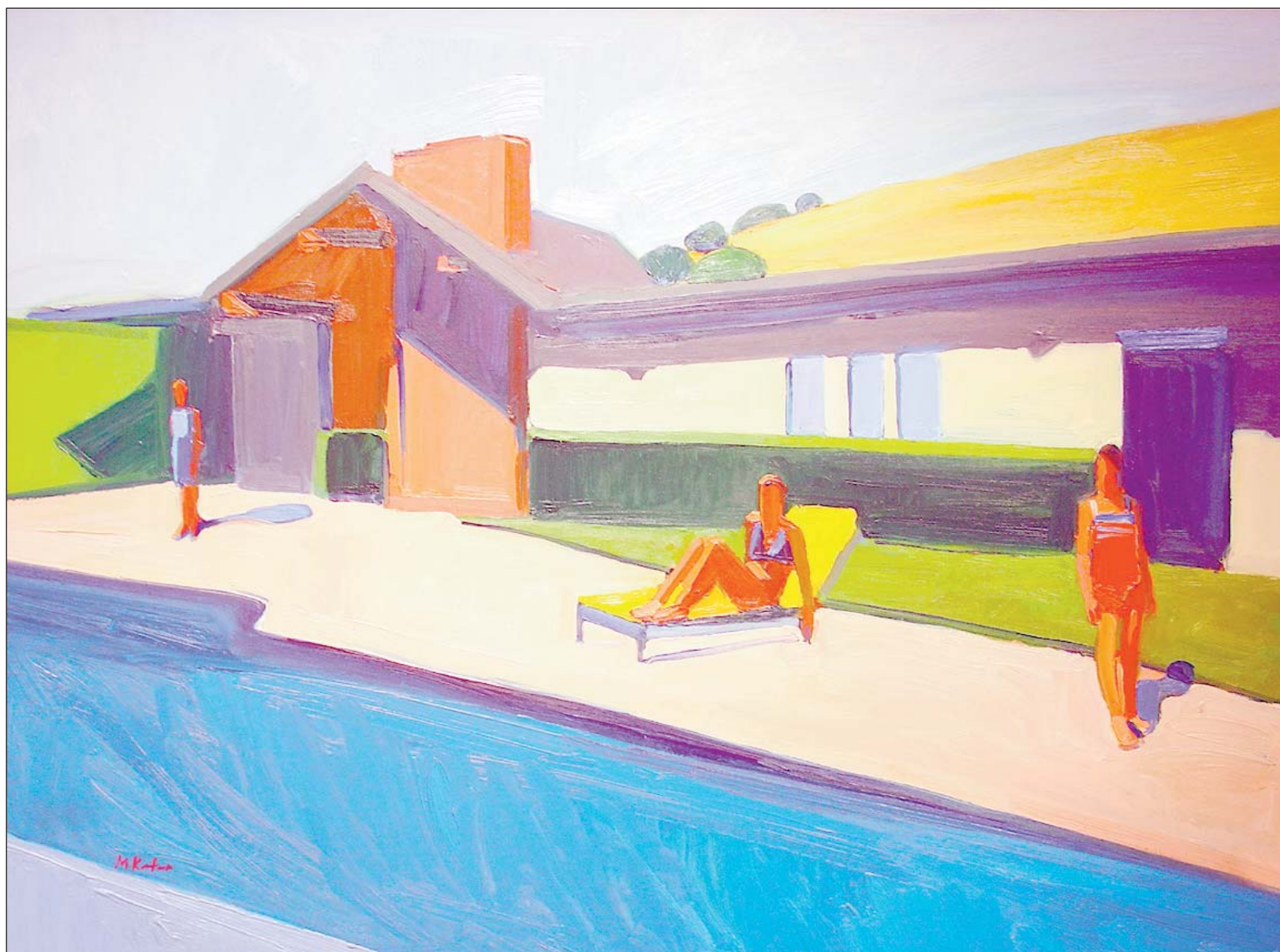
Judith Steinberg's (Stamford) "Mother Lode" scrolls aluminum and printing in a delightfully playful 3-D wall off the wall sculpture. And Drew Klotz (Weston) transforms a cold steel sunflower into a cooling fan as a mechanical pun. Mike Wright's (Provincetown, Mass.) eponymous "Boogie Woogie" revisits Mondrian's grid in a deadpan driftwood assemblage.

Photography, video and a plethora of plugged in, high-tech "media arts" are given full courtesies here. Steve Gildea's "Japanese Lessons" is a smile inducing simulated road test pushing the boundaries between video game and creative design.

Russ Lawrence's (Southport) color negative print is an ominous hotel façade against the type of eerie sky we might associate with a David Lynch film. N. W. Gibbons (Greens Farms) has clearly mastered tintype technique with an old sepia toned chicken coop evoking a Matthew Brady triptych.

On a lighter note: Kristine Gaier (Katonah, N.Y.) is still on the golden road at those magical summer lawn festivals with road-weary survivors of the Grateful Dead; we notice Uncle Jerry beaming from behind his aviator glasses. "Warhol Condensed" by Alan B. Tuttle (Oxbow, N.Y.) is the final coup on object on the supermarket shelf. One wonders if its contents have long since lapsed its 1963 expiration date.

The 56th Annual Art of the Northeast continues through June 10th. Silvermine Guild Art Center is at 1037 Silvermine Road, New Canaan, for information contact 966-9700 or visit: www.silvermine.org



Take a dip: A quintessentially suburban malaise voice pours through "Yellow Lounge Chair" by Michele Katen of Hartford.

New threads or faded glory?

Ups and downs at annual Silvermine show out

Any surviving exhibition marking its 56th annual incarnation selected from 1,200 competing entries has every reason for celebration. So first the happy news from the Silvermine Guild Arts Center:

The prestigious Art of the Northeast show delivers on its promise as the premiere showcase for "new" artists moving up through the ranks. In its scale, depth and overall quality of fresh talents, there's no equivalency in the region. It's an "American Idol" star search for visual artists.

Now the disturbing news: much of the "new art" is re-cycled, highly distressed and thoroughly faded out in the wash. Imitative cloning in painting, sculpture, drawing and multi-media produces worn-

all" post-modernist dilemma.

Art, culture, politics, and consumerism are all woven into the same fabric. "Art of the Northeast" thus morphs into the best retail outlet for cruising this art driven window shopping; sort of the Clinton Crossing of highbrow sophistication.

And so goes the art world we witness through a clarifying peephole lens at Silvermine's admirable Kunsthalle. The galleries, newly brightened up with previously covered clearstory barn-like windows, have never sparkled more brilliantly. Indeed, we are all immeasurably enriched by the continuing legacy offered by Silvermine's professional staff and its dedicated guild members and tireless volunteers.

Imported from Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art with her discerning eye separating the wheat from the chaff is chief curator Elizabeth A. T. Smith. Says she, "The final selection reflects a cross-section

ART REVIEW



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textures as the spin cycle dial is left on continuous rotation. From this quarter, the remnant swatches of this new clothing is becoming a bit too threadbare.

This year's Silvermine showcase visit reminds me of a recent shopping adventure trying to replace my old worn-out blue jeans. Expecting to find a standard mid-\$20s or so replacement - not low-cut, zig-zagged stitched, or intentionally tattered into shreds - I experienced sticker shock as a multi-body pierced young lady handed me a \$98 designer pair. "Get with the program" appeared as my hapless fate once I abandoned them on the dressing room hook.

The basic sturdy boot model from those Fillmore East / Woodstock days had evolved into a pricey, high-end imitation of some faded glory. Basic denim has become expensive parody and trickle-down commodity. This defines our "one-size-fits-



Fresh talent: Among the works featured in the Silvermine show are, clockwise from top right, "The Crowd" by Kristine Gaier, "In The Thick of It" by Laura Breitman and "Deer Prints" by Takashi Abe.

of the diversity of the media submitted ... [each work] demonstrates accomplished technical and aesthetic achievement."

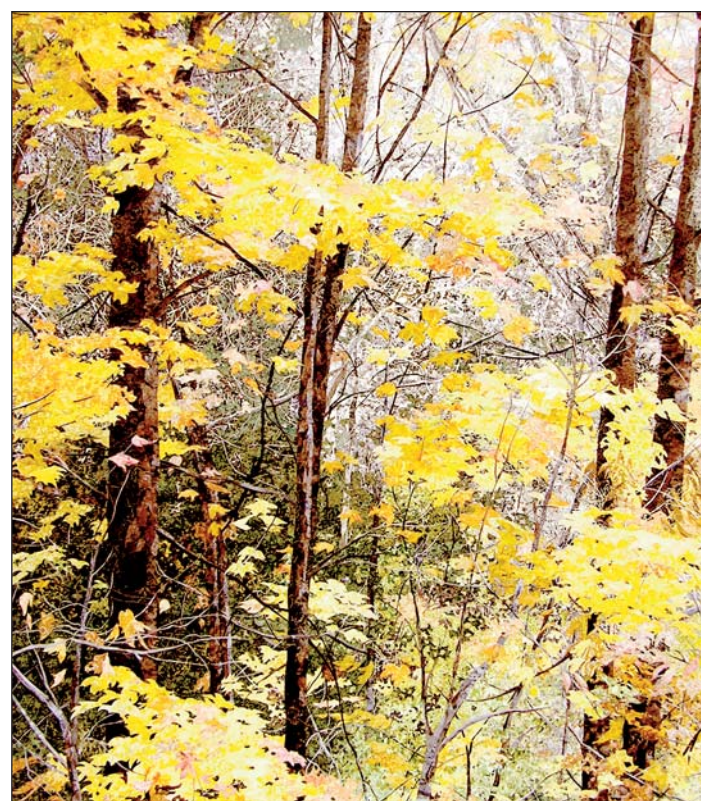
Cutting down the field to 100 works, we can trace a flowing progression of styles, approaches and re-workings from 19th century formalist to 21st century being and nothingness. "Janis in Chair" is Robert January's (Easton) nude homage to Ingres and the Ecoles des Beaux Arts holds up one column as the classical polarity.

At the other end of the spectrum is Takashi Abe's (New Paltz, N.Y.) "Deer Prints." Meritorious of a yet unfunded "Damien Hirst Taxidermy Award," Abe encases four furry slain deer hides with cloven hoofs. Whether this is necrophilia or a repulsion for desiccated animal anatomy remains unresolved. Morbid creepiness has become a virtue if we examine the slaughterhouse installations favored by leading contemporary curatorial taste.

"In the Thick of It," a fabric

collage by Laura Breitman, (Warwick, N.Y.) earned the Rosenthal Foundation's Best in Show prize. It's an impressive example of deliberative organization, stretching her craft into an autumnal labyrinth of illusory surfaces. Smaller, but of greater evocative power is Lauren Karetzky's (Brooklyn, N.Y.) "Sophia Prone." Its disquieting, painterly strength bears solid evidence of her impeccably advanced training. Karetzky's resume is an easy

▶ Please see ART on F2



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