

The nude show

by Jim Anctil

Gertrude Stein remarked: "When you are not rich, you either buy clothes or you buy art." In these economic times, the quotation could apply to *The Nude Show* at the Photographic Image Gallery, 208 S.W. First. Curated by Stu Levy, this show continues through July 7 in the downtown area now called Gallery Row. This is a major exhibition, the first large-scale examination of the nude in a Portland gallery setting, according to owners Caroline and Guy Swanson. These congenial folks have mounted an exhibition which includes contemporary and 20th-century master photographers, many of them local or from the Northwest. Prints are included which are in collections such as the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art.

The exhibition's listing of works begins: "Photography has been used to study the human form since the earliest days of the art." Perhaps in the first half of this century when photography was developing as a separate art form, it was easier to look upon the nude as belonging rightfully only to painting, since even serious photos of this subject were often considered pornography. With the emergence of the latter as a commercially distinct field, we can acknowledge those photographers who are exploring the unclothed human body as pure art. This is not to say that the erotic is not an important element in art as well.

Space does not permit a detailed description of all photographers and works included in the exhibition. A few examples which particularly caught this reviewer's attention are mentioned here, but others will find much of interest as well. Work by the legendary Imogen Cunningham and Edward Weston is represented, as well as important work by Ruth Bernhard, Wynn Bullock, Edmund Teske, and Jack Welpott. Work by Northwest photographers David Bayles, Marsha Burns,

Paul Dahlquist, Goodwin Harding, Stewart Harvey, Susan Hereford, Cherie Hiser, Richard Loftis, Susie Morrill, Marly Stone, and Shedrich (Shad) Williames is also included.

Whereas the "stuff" of painting is color, the very essence of photography is light. Photographers have chosen to pose their models in many different settings, inside or outdoors, in natural or artificial surroundings. In Cunningham's "Rainwater on Oregon Beach" the contours of the figure interplay with sculptured rock forms. Edna Bullock's "David" series uses sand dunes or rocks and in some the human figure is literally dwarfed by distance and scale. The "Nude Beach Series" by Marly Stone again uses this setting. Harding plunges us into a primeval Oregon forest, where the solitary nude males seem to be engaged in the act of merging with or regenerating from nature. In some of Judy Dater's and Stone's images we find ourselves in barren moonscapes. The latter's "Garden of Eden" seems reminiscent of a poisonous Max Ernst setting.

Interiors are the backgrounds in the work of Wynn Bullock, Burns, Dahlquist, Hiser, Williames, etc. Each photographer has strived to utilize the space around the figure in different ways. Burns uses a rather sterile setting and androgynous models often with strong vertical framing elements to give her work a distinctive quality. Williames allows a bright window pattern in a darkened room to play across the figure. Bernhard confines her model in a box either reclining or kneeling for heightened tension. In Wynn Bullock's "Torso in Window" we glimpse a Magritte-like truncated female form. Hiser's interest in tattoos is reflected also in the busy patterns she surrounds her figures with, as does Judith Steinhauer. Theresa "Re" Airey gives many of her nudes an "airy," semi-abstract quality. Her "Scream" is very different from the famous Munch painting of the same title, yet she surrounds the figure in an iridescent shimmering aura. Multiple imagery appears in the work of Teske, Francesca Lacagnina and Stone.

Beautiful images of the black male nude are the subject of work by Edna Bullock, Burns, Martha Pearson Casanave, Dater,

Blake Little, and Williames. One by Dianora Niccolini is especially powerful. Dancing figures are portrayed in many shots, and there are numerous whimsical and humorous treatments. Richard Gibson's feather may tickle your fancy.

Cherie Hiser has said: "East coast photographers are unhappy because they're unhappy, and west coast photographers are unhappy because they're happy." Judge for yourself. Most of the photos in the show are monochromatic black and white. The quality of the work and the prints available are first-rate. Don't confine yourself merely to the pictures on the walls, but do also browse through the racks containing unframed prints. There are many treasures to be discovered.

The Girl Artists are back

by Eve Sicular

The Girl Artists are telling me about their new performance piece, "Souvenirs." They are talking about how difficult it is to find time for their group process of writing, designing, producing, and performing around their other work schedules. And about bringing their piece to its present form from its origin over a year ago as "Souvenirs of a Planet Worth Saving." They have lots to say about an earlier work, their first collaboration in which they added live performance to the environment they had created (becoming waitresses in the restaurant-set of *Split Shift Cafe*), and the fun they have as observers, participants, commentators and satirists of modern life.

But they mostly do not want to speak specifically about "Souvenirs" because they do not want to give the plot away. They will say their new work deals with fear in modern life, fears of destruction which we all share. They will say that this piece shows a community's

response to loss, set in a neighborhood where a recent tragedy brings people closer together. They do say, don't be afraid to come see this, it will entertain you, it will remind you of many things which make life worth living, the good, the wonderful and the obnoxious. They promise that as before, the messages in their art will not level a sledge hammer at any time, but will often find audiences identifying with what they express, by giving voice to common feelings.

Who are the Girl Artists? Char Breshgold, Kathy Clark, Cristina DeGennaro, Susan Martin and Lisa Siegel come from different parts of the country and diverse backgrounds. All went to art school or college in the 1970s. They formed the group six years ago in Portland as visual artists who were experimenting with collaborative work; four began by setting up the "Beach Party" in the gallery space adjacent to their studios. The giant beach balls, coolers of beer and surf music did not immediately seem the start of a major turn in their creative lives ("Except," as one Girl Artist recalls, "that my father thought I was going to ruin my career.")

While the Girl Artists' idea has always been to do performance that is entertaining and immediately accessible, they are doing a few things differently this time. Susan collaborates long distance from California with periodic working visits. The group now has their own four-track sound mixer (bought with an equipment grant from the Oregon Arts Commission), to produce audio accompaniment, so they have involved musicians and actors in making tapes for "Souvenirs." And their new piece is continuous theater for one and a half hours, longer than previous series of skits or vignettes which lasted an hour or so, total. They have been working a lot on their acting ("before, we were sticks, but it worked") making their transition from visual to performing artists more complete.

The Girl Artists say they plan to do "Souvenirs" elsewhere after their four performances in Portland, taking it on tour and letting it change as their ideas of the piece evolve and the spaces they perform in vary. The shows here will be at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts at 8 p.m., Thursday through Sunday, June 20th to 23rd. For more info, look at the calendar page. The group's shows do usually fill the house, so a phone call to PCVA to assure your seat is a good idea. Because the Girl Artists are back, and better than ever.

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