

# ART; Mysterious Abstractions and Otherworldly Photographs

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**SUMMIT**— ONE of two current shows at the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts here is "Paintings From New Jersey Collections" -- private collections, that is. And, as indicated in the catalogue by George Bolge, the director of the center, its chief purpose is to encourage visitors to acquire art. This is a bold idea and, evidently, one that works, for the show is the second in what promises to be a series of biennials.

Sad to say, the present example is a congested medley, although with four collections each represented by about 15 works, it could hardly have been anything else. The curators, Ellyn Dennison, Sharon Gill and Perijane Zarembok, give the impression of having been overwhelmed by the collectors, who are Shirley Aidekman, Ellen and Ken Aidekman, Harriet and Donald Rothfeld, Dr. Steven Shane and Judith Targan.

Yet, in retrospect, the show seems strangely cohesive -- as if the collectors were friends, when in fact they did not meet until the show's opening.

Be that as it may, there is an abundance of small abstractions -- glazed, stained, textured rectangles suggesting water or mist with occasional vestiges of figures. Ms. Targan, herself a painter, owns some of the most beautiful examples, including Hiro Yokose's tile-sized monochromes evoking light on water and imminent storms. Erik Blum, another master of delicately worked surfaces, is also in this collection, as is John Beerman, who is represented by a canvas filled with a reddish haze reminiscent of Seurat.

The Rothfelds, though they, too, own a Blum, as well as two cloudlike images by Alfonse Borysewicz, have a taste for expressionistic brushwork, as in the bright abstraction of a still life by Nicholas Maffei.











But the collector who seems most attracted to the mode is Dr. Shane, an anesthesiologist. There is no connecting taste with occupation, but it is worth noting that Dr. Shane has, on the one hand, Gary Stephan's portent in the sky, a monochrome titled "Timing Light," which is reproduced here, and, on the other hand, a somewhat agitated scene of a cave, with figures and a carcass all silhouetted dark brown against a pink-orange sky. This is a painting on paper by a German artist, Helmut Middendorf.

Shirley Aidekman, a successful designer and manufacturer of jewelry (and a major benefactor and life member of the center), takes pride in a putty-colored nude sitting on a wrought-iron chair, by Philip Pearlstein, and an equally severe-looking potted plant beside a window overlooking a snowy landscape that was painted by Jeanette Chupak.

Roger Brown's scene of workers picketing a skeleton of a building that stands between two high-rises with a figure silhouetted in every window indicates that Mr. Aidekman shares

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his mother's taste for the Spartan. But he diversifies with a gentle landscape by Jane Freilicher and Yvonne Jacquette's sky full of cumulus and cirrus clouds.

The longer the show is studied, the less like an "art expo" and more rewarding it becomes. Even so, it is a relief to turn from this to Howard Nathanson's photographs, also on view at the center.

Mr. Nathanson, who was recently awarded a photography fellowship by the State Council on the Arts, shows many black-and-white prints and a handful of Cibachromes. His subjects are still lifes composed with close attention to the textures of his materials -- withered flowers, felt, battered metal pots and so forth -- as well as landscapes and buildings, which he treats like sculpture.

Mr. Nathanson is a photographer who leaves nothing to chance but is quick to take advantage of the ephemeral -- like withered leaves, a subject that has recently caught the attention of Gordon Parks, working in color. But while Mr. Parks somehow transforms his leaves into otherworldly creatures, Mr. Nathanson accepts them for what they are. In fact, one of his best efforts is a near-chiaroscuro study of leaves combined with a crumpled pot, which is also reproduced on this page.

Another is a view of a chrysanthemum standing in a vase behind a diaphanous curtain -- a "ghost" that at first glance seems to be a double exposure. Though Mr. Nathanson resists the lure of Surrealism, mystery is seldom far away in these pictures. An especially striking example is a mud house in Spain that is crumbling to reveal beautiful wooden "bones" underneath.

The photography display, which is open Monday through Thursday from 9 A.M. to 9:30 P.M., Friday and Saturday from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. and Sunday from 2 to 4 P.M., closes Jan. 5. "Paintings," on the other hand, which is open Monday through Friday from noon to 4 P.M. and Saturday and Sunday from 2 to 4 P.M., remains on view through Jan. 8.

Photos: "Timing Light," left, a painting by Gary Stephan, and "Dried Leaves, Crushed Can," a photograph by Howard Nathanson, are on display in two separate exhibitions at the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts in Summit. (Photographs from New Jersey Center for Visual Arts)

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