

"Almost Real"

It's surreal-ly good show at Carrie Haddad Gallery in Hudson.

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By Neil A. Chassman

"Almost Real"
Carrie Haddad Gallery, 622 Warren
Street, Hudson
Through Jan. 16, 2005
Hours: Thurs.-Mon., 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
518.828.1915
www.carriehaddadgallery.com

"Almost Real," at the reasonably commodious Carrie Haddad Gallery in the culturally "in the swim" milieu of Warren Street in Hudson, moves about the edges of what would otherwise be called "Surrealism," i.e., a juxtaposition of elements not ordinarily placed together that creates a world discordant – or even a disquietude – and usually has the sense of dream. The appellation "Almost Real" – arrived at partially to preclude the possibility of direct comparison with those of the early 20th-century movement – as an indicator of something close to the real is only true in so far as the dance of elements includes aspects or motifs of normality while the rhythm of their encounter jars the viewer in a somewhat disturbing manner or in a mysterious lurking of an experience that insistently confuses the viewer.

All art that deserves the name presents a paradoxical play of images or elements in order to avoid the death of all art, which is cliché. That is, all good art must have the subtle twist, which incidentally is what makes "haiku" so appealing. In "Surrealism," there is the added quality of dream-like existence or phantasmagoria, which allows the elements in their articulation and placement to provide a dimension of distress. These juxtapositions tend to engender a heightened awareness both of the objects so juxtaposed and of the experiences of them – newly synthesized into an enlarged reality for the viewer.

Particularly in art that has this thrust, there are two obvious elements that, when strong, give rise to what might be known as "quality." They are: 1. concept, and 2. relationship of forms and/or motifs. The power of the brush/brush manner/or expression of construction may be less attended to, and in this show that is certainly the case.

In the first room, which is ample and pleasing and has a stiling area for rest or lengthy observation and a nicely located gallery director/assistant desk, is a sizeable group of works by Caroline Golden titled "The Many Faces of Alice," with images and ideas inspired by "Alice in Wonderland." These works are collage/relief compositions with strangely but reasonably

articulated elements/appendages. Images in magazines and her personal history as a woman in the world are the motivations for a highly crafted decorative assault upon expectations of sensibility. The works are vivacious and illustrational within the, at times, medieval feeling of her universe. I noticed how very positive were the reactions of patrons to her work. Her appreciators are sure to feel gladdened that she is to give a talk at the gallery sometime in January – which will be announced soon.

In other rooms are the creations of six more artists in this group. These other rooms are less appealing as spaces and some are rather claustrophobic, although one might find a playful "nook and cranny" sense, which they possess. Of these others, I enjoyed the poetic architectural placement in the paintings of Tina Sotis, which create a mystery somewhat akin to de Chirico, or the ominous flutterings of Max Ernst, and the stark and direct magic of Edward Hopper. Whether or not the works are a bit close to their roots, I won't decide, but they are appealing and present a charming mystery.

David Konigsberg utilizes fanciful object, e.g. vehicles of an antique flavor with oversize wheels set against an unstable distance with a paint application that interestingly confounds the issue. I discovered myself thinking of the time warp stories of Jack Finney ("Time and Again" and "About Time"). I found myself pleasingly haunted in uncertainty.

Ann Getsinger uses objects in the near ground, simple and bold, against a romantic background, and brings to mind some of the striking placement of Rene Magritte. Gillie Holme evokes the past and a play on it by charmingly altering tintypes with a delicacy. Franco Mondini-Ruiz got my attention with his quirky fiddling with words in his title "Do-Nut Disturb." And Eckhard Etzold engages in an examination of the relationship of photography to painting with a subject drawn from natural history museums.

This show is really rather diverse and so may elicit the interest and appreciation of varied visitors to the gallery.

Neil A. Chassman is an art historian and art theorist who lives in Columbia County.