



Savako, Portico Poplyn No. 88-94 (Installation Title: Portico Earth Landing from the Planet Pajamaja), 2005, polyester, fiber glass, and urethane paint, 59 x 21 x 21" each

Over the Top—Under the Rug

Group Show at SICA curated by D. Dominick Lombardi

by Valery Oisteanu

Art exhibits in the first half of the first decade of the 21st century were shaped by curators and critics, revealing their strong individual tastes for experimental and edgy art created by professional artists and mavericks from the world of science, sometimes in collaboration. *Over the Top—Under the Rug* is one of the most unusual of the pack.

D. Dominick Lombardi is a multitasking artist, curator, critic and writer, and for this show he has gathered a rich group of provocative multi-dimensional dioramas and "unanswerable puzzles." An optimistic risk-taker and a humorous "art-party organizer", Lombardi presents the work of 70 artists in displays clearly able to both educate and

provoke a heated conversation among media representatives, students and visitors at *The Shore Institute of the Contemporary Arts* (SICA), helped along by the director of this unusual art institution in New Jersey, Doug Ferrari.

The show is a mix of worldly experimental art, local magicians' conjurings and "surprise science-fair-like-machine" works assembled by artist-provocateurs.

Here are some examples from a subdivision of the exhibit that could be called "self-reflecting-symbols":

- Painter Jesse von der Ahe uses menstrual blood to reveal a psychedelic explosion of fireworks in her floral-patterns, called *Untitled*, comprising gold leaf and

resin on a clay board.

- Ninko Ouzo's cartoon and 3-D box caricatures her own childhood's mass-culture pop influences.

- Peter Rittmaster presents an assemblage-box in an open briefcase highlighting a future ray gun called *Third Eye Facilitator*, a "spy kit" with surveillance capability. The artist statement reads: "The Cosmic Plaster enables you to attain enlightenment without going through years of deprivation, discipline and study."

- Artist Camille Eskell is preoccupied with female body images and calls her piece *Coming Up Roses*. The work is a resin-mannequin bust with rows of protruding teeth from a deep crack running from the breasts to the vulva. *Vagina Dentate* is a Freudian concept of a vision that men presumably have before a performance complex sets in. She has other sculptures more optimistically inclined.

- Eskell's friend Eleanor White has a phantasmal S&M-style suit hanging from the ceiling with thousands of tailor-pins sticking outward & aligned perfectly, called *Pin Stripe*.

- Margaret Evangeline shoots a rifle into a stainless steel metal sheet and videotapes the proceedings and resulting bullet holes.

- Christopher Chambers's *RACK* comprises four "plastic-fruits of blissful emptiness" hanging from a coat rack, as if in a flea market. They are acid-colored and childishly kitsch objects preying on a gullible audience trying to discover the non-message.

- "Post abstract-expressionist" John Perreault drips oil mixed with sand over "machine-



Jesse von der Ahe, *Untitled*, 2005, blood, gold leaf on clay board, 20 X 16"

produced" seascapes, producing a 3-D effect of ivy hanging as if in front of a cave by the sea.

Another small subset of the show can be categorized as post-kinetic computer-robots. For example:

- A surreal locust dressed in a ballerina's pink tutu is spinning around a metal poll and must be viewed through four large circular plastic magnifying lenses, enabling the viewer to see it in different perspectives and scales. This is what artist Michael Zansky calls *Little Dancer Age 14*. Beside the obvious Lolita complex, the artist is sending a sarcastic commentary on kinetic art reminiscent of Jean Tinguely. Or is it a whirling dervish from another planet? It's really hard to tell.
- Clark Jackson's *Healing Camp* features a machine on a tank in front of a slide show projected on a flat screen, activated by a computer.

An audience-participation category can be exemplified with:

- A sculpture of a metal-plastic *Big Bird* animal-hybrid; at the push of a pedal it moves

menacingly toward the viewer and attacks with a metal lever.

- One wall in SICA's "big old-factory" ground floor features 17 pieces of Dixie ceramic coffee cups, pastel colored with keys protruding and musical boxes inside playing muffled music. "Turn the key and listen," advises the sign; they are identified as by Jacqueline, John Shats and Morton.

- Three electronic musical robots made out of violins, drums and other percussion instruments are attached to a computer that plays on command when instructions are typed into a computer by the audience. The contraption performs music composed by the first violinist of Broadway's *Phantom of the Opera*: Kurt Coble and his futuristic PAM band trio.

Another subgroup is the collage/assemblage group influenced by dada as well as surrealist techniques advanced later by neo-dadas. Among them, Jason Sherry's *Scrabble/Eye Test Box* is a feast for connoisseurs and a complete enigma for everyone else. The explanatory card says, "A presentation of the everything with vague description and ambiguous theory... can't be wrong, or platonic forms, string and magic in the Temple of Gozer."

Finally, there is a selection of *Artwork That Doesn't Fit in Any Category*, such as:

- Todt, a collective of three siblings, is represented here by an old mechanical plow retrofitted as a weapon with sharp spears. To avoid public mutilation, the object is encased in glass.
- The artist Chaval presents a cartoonish acrylic painting of objects and figures resembling a collage.
- Anders Johnson presents soft



Anders Johnson, *Sledge Hammer Cozy*, 2005, fabric, zipper



Ninko Ouzo, *Frog with Flower*, acrylic on wood, 14 X 10"

sculpture as cozies for hammer, anvil, hand drill and a drill press—a sarcastic commentary on the pop-art soft sculpture of Claes Oldenburg.

It's hard to generalize about a group show of 70 artists. It is like a chorus with many individual stars, most of whom turn the banality of reality into dada pop experimental art that is thought-provoking, exciting and often puzzling.