

'Three Artists'

DM Contemporary, 148 Roger Canoe Hollow Road, Mill Neck, (516) 922-3552. Through Dec. 3.

All three artists in this show work on a square format. Isabel Bigelow's monotypes and Carole Freysz Gutierrez's canvases take natural forms as points of reference for abstract compositions, while Louise P. Sloane's mixed-media paintings are geometric arrangements of tones and textures based on written language.

Ms. Sloane deliberately makes it impossible to decipher the script on her canvases and wood panels, using molding paste or paint straight from the tube to give it a physical presence. The relief quality is enhanced by contrasting underpainting that is allowed to peek through the surface colors, making the cursive writing appear to float or shimmer. This sensuous effect complements the formality of the grid structures.

There is a challenge in these works, like trying to read a dead language. In "True Blue," one of Ms. Sloane's largest pieces, the entire texts of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are encrusted on rectangles with subtle chromatic variations. The message may not be readable, but perhaps that obscurity itself is the meaning.

Ms. Gutierrez uses layering in a very different way. Her stylized floral motifs are created by a stencil-like technique, in which negative shapes act as windows that reveal imagery below the painted surface.

They are decorative, to be sure, but also intriguing in the way they restrict access to what lies beneath the mask. In "Becoming 9," a green overlay obscures playful patterns that seem to bubble up through a translucent haze.

Ms. Bigelow's prints offer shadowy impressions of branches and vines set against monochromatic, delicately textured backgrounds. Like Art Nouveau and Asian brush paintings, they are formalized responses to the close observation of natural forms.

30th Annual Juried Fine Art Exhibition

Smithtown Township Arts Council, Mills Pond

ART REVIEW/HELEN A. HARRISON

The Declaration of Independence As Abstract Art



From left, Jim Schutte's "Woman With a Hat" at the Smithtown Township Arts Council; Carole Freysz Gutierrez's "Flowers 4" and Isabel Bigelow's "Poppies" at DM Contemporary; and Sidney Goodman's "Wounded Head" at the Anthony Giordano Gallery.

House, 660 Route 25A, St. James, (631) 862-6575. Through Dec. 3.

This national competition was juried by Claudia Altman-Seigel, the director of the Luhring Augustine Gallery in Manhattan. It features 37 artists, some with multiple entries.

Three paintings by Shain Bard, the show's top prize winner, are variations on the sunset theme. In her best-in-show canvas, the sun disappears at the end of a suburban street. The shimmering atmosphere is apparent only at a distance; at close range, the forms harden into paint-by-numbers patterning. For subtle luminosity, look instead at Iacopo Pasquinelli's tranquil panoramic views of distant hills across Italian fields.

"Moving Forward" earned the painter Ray La Mantia an honorable mention. His view over the handlebars of his speeding bicycle cleverly mixes motion and stasis.

Among other noteworthy canvases are Bruce Laird's abstracted self-portrait, in which his features are broken into camouflagelike fragments, and Mikhail Gubin's "Once Upon the Roof," a bizarre scene of children cannibalizing their dolls that harks back to 1930's social allegories.

Duane Wolford's "Heirlooms," a sensitive acrylic still life of crockery and fabric, has the appropriately hermetic quality of treasured artifacts frozen in time. Unfortunately, its nuances are upstaged by an overwhelming frame. Scott Weber draws the viewer in for a

close examination of his elaborately coded drawings, full of humorous characters and hidden messages. At the opposite technical extreme, Lara Loutrel's small, minimal intaglio prints also reward close scrutiny.

Richard Huttner's boxes painted with simplified cloudlike shapes are engaging meditative objects, as are Sally Myers's miniature stoneware shrines.

'Gestures of Humanity'

Anthony Giordano Gallery, Dowling College, Idle Hour Boulevard, Oakdale, (631) 244-3016. Through Dec. 11.

This two-person show pairs the figurative artists Sidney Goodman and Paul Marcus, who focus on humanistic themes. But that is pretty much all they have in common.

Mr. Goodman's paintings and drawings maintain a delicate balance between form and content. The human figure is his primary subject, but despite his technical mastery he is not interested in literal representation. His people assume roles in the passion play of modern life, yet they are reminiscent of archetypes that have endured since antiquity.

In "Oncoming Figures," a line of marchers approaches the viewer, but their purpose is uncertain and even their position in space is ambiguous. "Crowd Above" is a group of strangely dislocated figures, one of whom may be a lynching victim —

or perhaps a leaping acrobat. Metaphors abound, interpretations are open-ended, and one is left to ponder the enduring mystery of the human condition.

In Mr. Marcus's work, on the other hand, the message trumps the medium. His painting style is as clumsy as Mr. Goodman's is sophisticated. Instead of archetypes, he gives us stereotypes and caricatures.

This is a venerable tradition, but Mr. Marcus is no Daumier. His sociopolitical critiques are expressed in hackneyed terms: oppressed workers exploited by Wall Street tycoons, helicopters hunting down illegal immigrant families, America as the Evil Empire. Notwithstanding his heartfelt outrage at social injustice, his art does not measure up to his ambition.