



Sixth Annual Juried International Guild of Realism Exhibition, Sage Creek Gallery, 200 Old Santa Fe Trail, 988-3444; through Oct. 22

Spend an hour or so at the *Sixth Annual Juried International Guild of Realism Exhibition* hosted by Sage Creek Gallery, and you are bound to find something to soothe your soul or make you smile. The show features 79 pieces by 71 artists rendered in a variety of media — watercolor, acrylic, oil, color pencil, graphite, and tempera. If nothing else, you'll be impressed by some impeccable brushwork. But that's not to say that each entry is a winner. A few yawners are part of the mix, which includes landscapes, still lifes, figure and animal studies, portraits, allegorical works, and a smidgen of soft porn.

In any exhibit devoted to realistic fare, one expects to see examples of *trompe l'oeil* painting, and there are, indeed, several fool-the-eye pieces in the tradition of Raphaele Peale, John Peto, and William Harnett. So-called rack paintings — images of makeshift bulletin boards — are in abundance, portraying two-dimensional items such as letters, photos, postcards, and valentines held in place by tacks and/or ribbons stretched across a surface.

American Idols by Lorena Kloosterboer features a simulated wooden support adorned with postage stamps of John Wayne, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, and Snoopy as well as a key hanging from a pushpin that casts a wonderful shadow. Dennis Crayon's *Rocketman* is fun for the overlapping effects in its depiction of a photo of kids' playthings atop a page from a coloring book atop a piece of yellow paper from a legal pad. Did I mention the suspended crayon hanging on a string? Check out where the string begins and where it ends. And if you can find the artist's signature within the composition, I give you a lot of credit.

I expected to see in this show a lion's share of *memento mori* paintings — still lifes that display a human skull, a wilted flower, and/or an hourglass as symbols of human mortality. But there was only one. In *Alphabet Soup* by George Gonzalez, a skull is placed dead center on a book — *Soup for the Soul* — that also supports a silver spoon positioned in front of the skull, parallel to the viewing plane. Piled inside of the skull are wooden play-blocks with letters on them that may or may not have hidden meaning. As a backdrop to all of this is a small, framed blackboard with a drawer. Written on the blackboard are the words *ars sine scientia nihil est* — “without knowledge art is nothing.” Part of the phrase is water-stained, and a large drip can be seen running down the board just above the skull.

For sheer showmanship in illustration, David Bowers' *Access Denied* is a standout. The scene is of a man and woman alone in a mountainous desert terrain at sunset or sunrise. The man is bare-chested and clean-shaven, wearing long pants with an elongated red fez on his head. He is bent over and holding — or trying to remove — a glass cube that is situated over the woman's head. She is decked out like a bride in a white dress and veil. The two are touching hands through the glass like prisoners do with loved ones during visiting hours at the state pen. Mysteriously floating above the woman is a blue pitcher dripping a clear liquid onto the glass cube. If you see the woman as being seated, she has surely posited herself onto some prickly cacti. Despite the painting's allegorical narrative being a tad histrionic, Bowers' minute detailing of his figures is amazing.

If you prefer pictures that exude sweetness and sexuality, then *Moment in Time* by Ed Copley will catch your eye. Envision a young lass with shoulder-length blond hair in a white blouse with a laced-up vest and golden skirt, looking as though she is wondering what the future holds. Copley's painting obviously caught the attention of the award committee as it garnered the IGOR Best of Figurative Award and deservedly so — except for one minor detail. Remember the *Seinfeld* episode that revolved around a beautiful woman with “man hands”? For all we know, Copley's precious woman might be kin to van Gogh's women in *The Potato Eaters*.

Left, George Gonzalez: *Alphabet Soup*, oil, 16 x 20; above, Ken Scaglia: *Caddy Packed*, acrylic, 36 x 24 inches



Debbie Stevens: *Protected*, oil, 30 x 30 inches

An anomaly amid all the colorful work in the Guild's exhibit is *Reflections on the Past*, a black-and-white graphite drawing by Nick Long. It's a close-up image of a doorknob attached to a decrepit house with a cracked door frame and peeling paint. By the looks of it, the structure has long been abandoned. But seen in the highly reflective doorknob is a fragment of the rural countryside in which the house stands, welcoming and peaceful.

Personal favorites in this eclectic show are *Persistence of Vision* by Debra Teare and Ken Scaglia's *Caddy Packed* — winner of the IGOR Creative Achievement Award. The former is an oil painting with nods to some modern masters, while Scaglia's acrylic piece elicits a wonderful sense of nostalgia. The title of Teare's work evokes *The Persistence of Memory* by Dalí but visually has nothing in common with it. In presenting an upright wooden box with different-sized compartments occupied by unrelated objects — a pear, a tube of paint, a light bulb, and a pencil — Teare clearly references the surrealist visions of Magritte as well as the constructs of Joseph Cornell. Her empty enclosures — painted in red, yellow, and blue — seem taken from Mondrian's late work.

Scaglia's photorealist *Caddy Packed* seems larger than its actual size because of a bold, saturated color scheme and an oblique perspective that sucks you into the composition. Enhancing that effect is a hunkered-down vantage point at the left-rear bumper of an old midnight-blue Cadillac with chrome and wood trim, which leads the eye to the front of the car and beyond. One has to visually backtrack within the picture in order to see the subtleties in brushwork and incidental reflections in the fender and fender skirt of the car. I liked that dynamic. But best of all, *Caddy Packed* took me back to many Sunday afternoons perusing flea markets and classic car shows, each filled with distinct sounds and smells — the murmur of adult conversation and babies crying, plus the sweet scent of elephant ears dusted with cinnamon and the piquant reek of grilled bratwurst.

Sage Creek Gallery doesn't serve such fat-filled foodstuffs, but the visual buffet of the *Guild of Realism Show* goes down just fine.

— Douglas Fairfield