

The Boston Globe

January 13, 2005

Pieces Go Together in Exhibits, on Stage

by Denise Taylor

Timothy Harney is a curator in pursuit of purity. To him, a collage with a word or image layered into it is a spatial message interrupted, a visual idea disturbed. Collage, he believes, should revel in color and form. Juxtaposition of shapes, the play of hues, the chatter of pattern - this is the language, he has said, collage should speak.

So, for "Seven in Collage" which he guest-curated for the New Art Center in Newton, these are the types of painterly collages he chose.

"The primary motive was to show really strong collage that is not reliant on imagery or some of the more superficial ideas about collage," he said.

Among the pieces on display are 13 paintings by John Grillo, whose work is found in the collections of museums worldwide, including the Guggenheim and The British Museum. Grillo was a seminal player in the San Francisco branch of the abstract expressionist movement, and he later taught Harney at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst some 25 years ago. They have been friends ever since, and the now-88-year-old Grillo lives in Wellfleet.

"I look for any opportunity to show Grillo to Boston audiences," said Harney, who lives in Beverly. "For someone who was born in Lawrence and taught for years at Amherst, he's almost unknown on the Boston art scene, which is unfortunate because he's the equal of de Kooning or Motherwell, and if history gets it right, he'll be seen that way."

As for Grillo's approach to collage, Harney said it recalls abstract expressionist action paintings, which emphasized the act of flinging or smearing paint on the canvas (think Jackson Pollock). "Grillo's layered paper collages almost feel like paints being thrown and layered, so they're very physical," he said.

Harney himself teaches at both the DeCordova Museum School in Lincoln and Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, so he also looked to the next generation of artists for this show. Three of his former students - Carol Gove and Robert LeBranche, both of New Hampshire, and Karen Clarke of Newburyport - are among his "very carefully selected" group.

"These are very fine, young, promising artists," he said. "I really wanted to present a different group of artists than you usually see." Also showing are Dawn Southworth of Gloucester, Suzanne Ulrich of Marblehead, and Harney himself.