

## ART

## Shows Focus on Less Familiar Artists

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

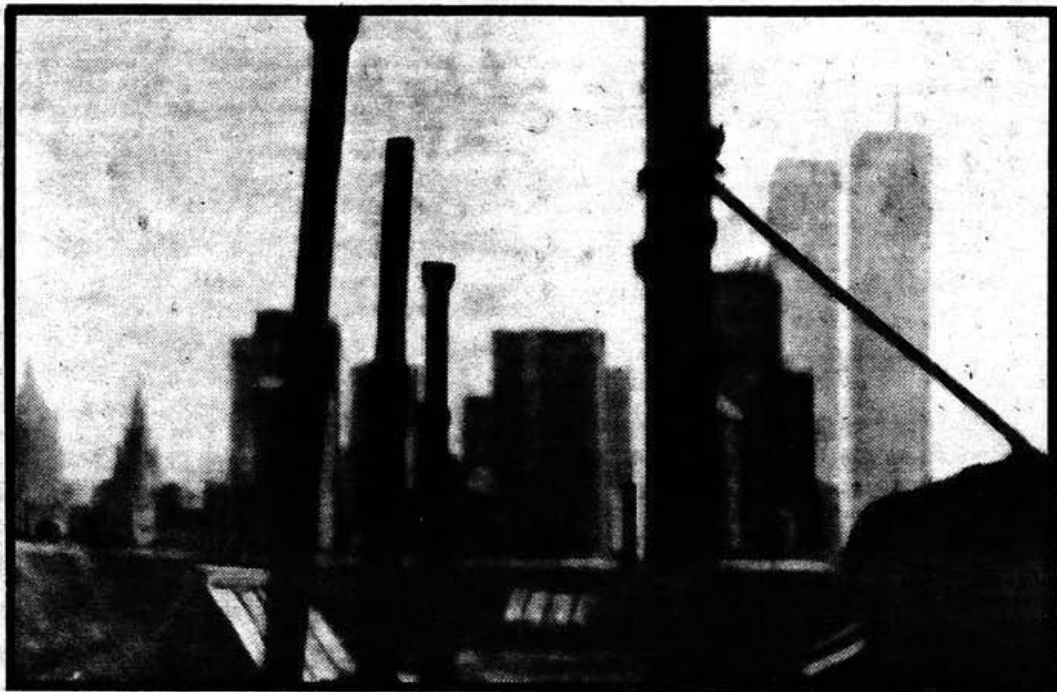
**A**T the Stamford Museum and Nature Center are paintings by Stephen Kuzma and Edward Meneeley. Bridgeport's Museum of Art, Science and Industry, meanwhile, is staging the first of two Connecticut artists' "showcases" — this one involving substantial bodies of work by Irving Sabo, Claude Furones and Constance Kiermaier. The five exhibitors have little in common beyond reputations that have yet to blossom in the main marketplace.

Mr. Kuzma, a New Yorker born in Toledo, Ohio, offers representational work dating from the mid-60's to 1982. An early self-portrait and a composition of construction workers show him preoccupied with figures emerging from a brown, Rembrandtian dusk. The artist abandoned this approach in 1967 for something that is atmospherically reminiscent of Francis Bacon and possibly autobiographical.

"Umbrella Man" is a tall, black and white canvas filled by a figure walking on a wet street, his head lost in the shadow of a real umbrella. This is attached to the top of the picture and its handle is grasped by a protruding, gloved "hand." The style recurs in a 1975 image of over-life-sized silhouettes of men crowding around a pair of white male legs lying on a sheet, and again in 1982. This time the legs, attached to a supine body with gesticulating hands, are reposing on a window sill against a moonlit sky.

A painter who trained at the Art Students League and who is shown intermittently in New York, Mr. Kuzma is not exactly an Expressionist. Yet, though a competent painter, he gives the impression of being at the mercy of his emotions. Sometimes they serve him very well, as in the small, square canvas of a black skyline against a light sky during a storm. At other times, they appear to distract him into melodrama (the leg paintings) or constrict him into painting for no observable purpose, as in the landscape with the Statue of Liberty in the background.

At first Mr. Meneeley, a native of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., who lives in New York City, looks to be a very decisive painter — of geometrical shapes with edges that are variously clean, blurred or jagged. The pictures that span the last decades begin with Barnett Newman-type stripes running down either side of vertical canvases. Where the stripes are orange on a slate-blue ground, a brighter blue



'Roof Painting No. 4,' by Stephen Kuzma from the Stamford show

creeps out from beneath the slate, romantically softening the taped, orange edges, and bands of still another blue and pink run along the canvas's top and bottom.

Following on the stripes come images of quadrilaterals that often contain narrow bands of contrasting hues and are outlined in black. Almost invariably the shapes, four or five per canvas, are separated from their solid-colored backgrounds by cracks of white, as if large stretches of color had to be kept from abutting on each other at all costs. Even in the relatively simple wood construction, "Color Slide," there are nearly imperceptible interstices separating the central pink triangle from its green and cream borders.

Mr. Meneeley has enjoyed some critical attention and he is represented in numerous public and private collections. All the same, and despite his association with Barnett Newman, Theodore Stamos and other prominent names, the artist's work is likely to be unfamiliar to the Connecticut audience. Once an Abstract Expressionist, the artist now comes on like a Minimalist, but is really a color addict

constantly striving for the ecstacy that the great contrasts supply. The impression is of passion converted into obsession and the effect is a little forbidding.

If the atmosphere at the Bridgeport show is more free and easy, it may be because two of the exhibitors, at least, have not staked their all on art. Irving Sabo, whose sculpture is especially familiar to habitués of the New England annuals at Silvermine, is also a designer of furniture, which he has shown in museums in New York City and elsewhere.

Here, he has mustered numerous large sculptures involving beams and planks bolted together in a way that enhances the medium's springiness. Over the last few years, in fact, the tensile strength of wood has so absorbed the artist that he has been splitting his beams part of the way into extremely thin strips, then tethering the ends together lest they splay.

Born in Cuba, Mr. Furones has had some success as a commercial photographer, but the 40 or so prints he shows are a personal diary of

Bridgeport, where his family now lives, and an exotic place he makes of it, too.

Part of the problem is a tendency to photographic sentimentality — the dewy spiderweb kind of thing — and part of it is the saturated color that the Cibachrome process used by Mr. Furones yields. There's a shot of an oil tanker belching smoke in a harbor that is imposing, but mostly these are fantasies, such as the white garden furniture in a red-black landscape under a cranberry sky, mysterious beach scenes and so forth, that are lush enough to make cruise ships forego the Caribbean for unspoiled old Bridgeport.

Of Constance Kiermaier's 30 or so collage paintings, the series that contrasts black surfaces, shiny and matte, with strips of crumpled, white paper makes the strongest impact. Nevertheless, this artist, an alumna of the Yale School of Fine Arts, also tends toward technical virtuosity at the expense of emotion.

The Stamford exhibit, at 39 Scofield Town Road, runs through Sept. 6. The one in Bridgeport, at 4450 Park Avenue, ends next Sunday. ■

## ART

# More Real Than Real

By DAVID L. SHIREY

## EAST HAMPTON

**W**HEN realism started yet another comeback more than a decade ago, it was generally greeted in the art world with a shrug of indifference. Most of the comebacks of the last 30 years were unsuccessful. Was there any reason to believe that this one wouldn't be like the others, a short-lived phenomenon? The feeling in certain art circles was that realism had burned itself out, offering few new important possibilities, and that abstraction still held most of the artists in its powerful grip.

But this comeback did take. If realism has not made its mark over the entire nation, it has nevertheless become a major artistic force again. The reasons for its success this time around might be linked to a weariness with abstract art. Artists who could no longer find themselves in abstraction turned to realism. Realism was an esthetic lode that could still be resourcefully mined. Other artists who have been impressed by the realistic imagery of Pop saw realism as the only answer.

An exhibition entitled "Aspects of Realism" at Guild Hall is an aperçu of the new realism. It does not by any means provide a complete and exhaustive picture of the different kinds of realism — they are numerous — but it does demonstrate the rich diversity

that the new realism has engendered and certainly shows that there are fresh and profitable directions for realism to take.

The show was not intended, moreover, as a survey of realism but rather as a study of it — a current stylistic mode practiced by artists living or summering in the East Hampton area. Since 1949 Guild Hall has annually presented a regional exhibition of this sort, reflecting recent artistic developments. As such, it has been a valuable fixture on the Island. This display is no exception.

These works at various times have been called super-realist because they have a larger-than-life quality; sharp-focused realist because their imagery is incisively defined; photo-realist because the artists often use photographs as a technical means in the creation of the paintings. There is really no term, however, that effectively covers the multiple manifestations of the new realism. For all of its shortcomings, "new realism" might be the most appropriate description, at least until other, newer forms of realism come along.

One hallmark of many of the paintings is the heroic presence of their subject matter. Whether they are of artichokes, bread, books, faces, cows, sunsets or ramshackle tenements or whether they are large or small, they look more real than real, as if they had a supernatural quality. There's a feeling of aggrandizement about them, an



'Gypsy Moth,' tempera by Arthur Byron Phillips, is in the exhibition of realists at Guild Hall in East Hampton

enlargement of scale.

What is responsible for this is the limpid sharpness of the imagery, as if it had been neatly cut out from the world around it; the intensity in the rendering of details and the theatrical celebration of lights and darks. Too, most of the pictures are simply large in size, adding to their epic impact.

Along with the heroic comes the mysterious and mystical. Arne Besser's view of Greenwich Avenue simply depicts a woman in the window of a brownstone but is also teeming with all sorts of uncanny suggestions. Henry Koehler's oil of an artichoke makes the vegetable look like the archetypal artichoke whose origins might be shrouded in myth.

Ian Hornak's "Scottish Landscape," like a Casper David Friedrich painting, is not only a breathtaking glorification of nature but also a sort of transcendental vision of the world. Chuck Close's portraits entitled "Keith" and "Mark" endow these males with the appearance of self-styled deities. Their faces are so big, so close to the picture surface, so detailed that they overwhelm us as impenetrable beings.

An artist who explores the nightmarish mysteries and fears of the mind as a heightened pitch is Stephen Kuzma, whose "Foot Painting" can cause a viewer to associate with incandescently lit legs on a mortuary slab,

as if they were his own, surrounded by unidentifiable faces that might have come to identify the body.

Audrey Flack makes the commonplace uncommon. Her pictures grab-bags of disparate items such as cups, plates, glasses, photographs and flowers, which, when assembled together and given taut realist treatment, are elevated from the prosaic to a status of existence as special icons.

Howard Kanovitz, a pioneer of the new realist style, also brings together unrelated items — here a face in a floor, there a table, chair and part of a living room. His fusion of these elements does not unnerve, however; together, they appear unusually natural like the many different images mixed in our minds.

An initial innocence we first perceive in the intriguing temporas of Art by Byron Phillips rapidly turns into much more complex, quickening experience. Decaying houses with scarred, grassless lawns can become forbidding landscapes. A simple vegetable patch at its florid height foreshadows its own doom as gypsy motif work at destroying it and might even pose a threat to a child who sits amid the plant leaves.

The exhibition will remain on view through Aug. 13. The hall is open Monday through Saturday from A.M. to 5 P.M. and on Sunday from 5 P.M.