

Panorama

WEEKEND

AT THE STAMFORD MUSEUM

Two opposite sides of the canvas

By Jacqueline Moss
Special Correspondent

The two-man show at the Stamford Museum and Nature Center has more facets than the title, "Two Sides of the Canvas," suggests. Each artist paints in a style exactly the opposite of the other's and each body of work has its own range of references.

Stephen Kuzma is a realist. Landscapes and even figure paintings are remote. Sweeping storm clouds, bursts of steam and fading sunsets suggest the energy of Turner and the atmospheric spatial effects of Monet. His palette of browns is muddy Ashcan School or Urban Realism.

Meneeley's paintings are opaquely painted with large masses either compressed within rigid geometric boundaries or pushed to the canvas's edges.

Kuzma's sense of space, in contrast, is more traditional, combining



Stephen Kuzma's "Steam Pipes - 34th Street," 1980, on view at the Stamford Museum through Sept. 6.

ART IN REVIEW

the window-like perspectives of Renaissance compositions with the theatricality of the Baroque.

Certain color passages invite close scrutiny. The red, yellow and green windows in Kuzma's bleak "No Class Carriage" and the lavender, orange and yellow nesting rectangles of Meneeley's "Ionian Reflection Series II" are particularly effective. Often Meneeley introduces an irregular pattern outlined in heavy black lines, suggesting torn paper perhaps intended to shake the discipline of absolute geometrics as seen in "Agapi II," done in 1982. He also uses bands of color to reiterate the canvas's shape and direct the line of vision from the outer edges to the center spatial arena.

Some of Meneeley's pieces are built like platforms extending out from the wall more than a conventional canvas stretcher would have allowed. "Dream No. 1 and 3," 1981, each project about 5-6 inches into space and the picture plane continues from the front to all four sides. The idea has possibilities, but the works themselves are disappointing and tricky constructions which neither contribute to nor divert from uninspired motifs.

Similarly, "Ionian Reflection Series III, No. 2," 1981, a painted wood structure mounted on a tondo (circular) backing, seems contrived and one is inclined to turn to earlier pieces for a truer sense of the artist's accomplishments.

Kuzma employs a compositional framework that often borders on abstraction. Vertical office buildings, a block-like truck and the deep compartmented grid of a rainy city street become a structure against which dark-toned glazes and accenting reds and yellows are counterbalanced. These are also the colors of street lights as in "Lone Truck," 1978.

In an earlier piece, "Automat,"

1966, neon red letters and the flickering yellow of barely lit office windows function much the same way by highlighting sections of the nightclad city. One is reminded here of the settings in Reginald Marsh's narrative street scenes and Edward Hopper's lonely cityscapes of the early thirties.

"Steam pipes - 34th Street," 1980, is more animated. A larger painting, it is made light by billowing vapors reaching skyward. People are seen bracing their umbrellas against the wind. In fact, Kuzma's fascination with dreary streets and umbrella shapes has evolved into a continuing theme. An early example is a combine-painting "Umbrella Man No. 2," 1967, which consists of an actual umbrella joined to the canvas, covering a two-dimensional walking figure. A three-dimensional sleeved forearm and gloved hand extend toward the viewer, holding a real umbrella handle.

A small pencil study by Kuzma of "Dock Fire," 1978, is hung adjacent to the oil painting for which it was preparatory. Instructions on color and

general effects are indicated by the artist in a delightful and unaffected manner and one is charmed by notations such as "filthy warm," "cooler and brighter sky," "dirty greens" and "vaporous light glow," written across the quick sketch for himself rather than for a public audience. The artist's rendering of smoke is spontaneous as only an on-the-spot drawing can be, whereas the finished canvas is more static, relying on color for its sense of immediacy. One cannot help but recall stories about 18-19th century English painter Joseph Mallord William Turner whose fidelity to realism was so exacting. He was known to bring his paints to a scene, even to a raging fire in the Houses of Parliament, in order to accurately and sensitively depict the event in its fullest throes. Kuzma might take a lesson from this.

"Two Sides of the Canvas" runs through September 6. The Stamford Museum and Nature Center is located at Scofieldtown Road off High Ridge, north of the Merritt Parkway. (322-1646)