

Some are revealing and some only bare

By Keith Shaw

Special to Berkshires Week

GREAT BARRINGTON — Berkshire galleries rarely have exhibits devoted to the nude, but the Geoffrey Young Gallery takes the plunge this summer by offering "Reclining Nudes." Eighteen artists depict nude figures, both male and female, reclining in some fashion. In all, 57 artworks cram this small, unassuming space.

Geoffrey Young typically hosts wildly eclectic shows, which ping-pong between offbeat, artsy pieces and sophisticated, polished work; this one is no exception. Little else than exposed flesh and modest size sew this disparate artwork together. The exhibit discerningly limits photographs to Richard Kern's five C-prints of uninhibited models.

The show gives a rather skewed look at the current state of figurative art.

While most of these artists are represented by New York galleries, none reflect the classic realism stemming from Jacob Collins and his Grand Central Academy. This grassroots revival is an important development, and one example would have provided a welcome balance.

We find instead an overabundance of artwork brandishing poor drawing and painting, prized commodities in some circles. But if a work of art is to endure over the years, it needs genuine artistic merit and substance. In other words, if the emperor has no clothes, it doesn't really matter if

Gallery walks

By Keith Shaw

If you go ...

What: 'Reclining Nudes' group show

Where: Geoffrey Young Gallery,
40 Railroad St., Great Barrington

When: Through Sept. 4

Hours: Wednesday to Saturday,
11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Information: (413) 528-6210

he's reclining or not.

There are works of special note. Alexander Gorlizki's two Mogul-style miniatures appropriate various nudes from Western art. Gorlizki designs these pieces but then farms out their execution to skilled painters in Jaipur, India. You can either view this collaboration as postmodern globalism or artistic colonialism. Either way, you're left admiring the contributions of un-sung artists rather than Gorlizki's.

Don Doe's six garish watercolors are from his She Pirates series, and they are essentially pinup girls for pirates. These male fantasies depict women as sexual caricatures as though they were part of the plunder. His Young Mothers series, not

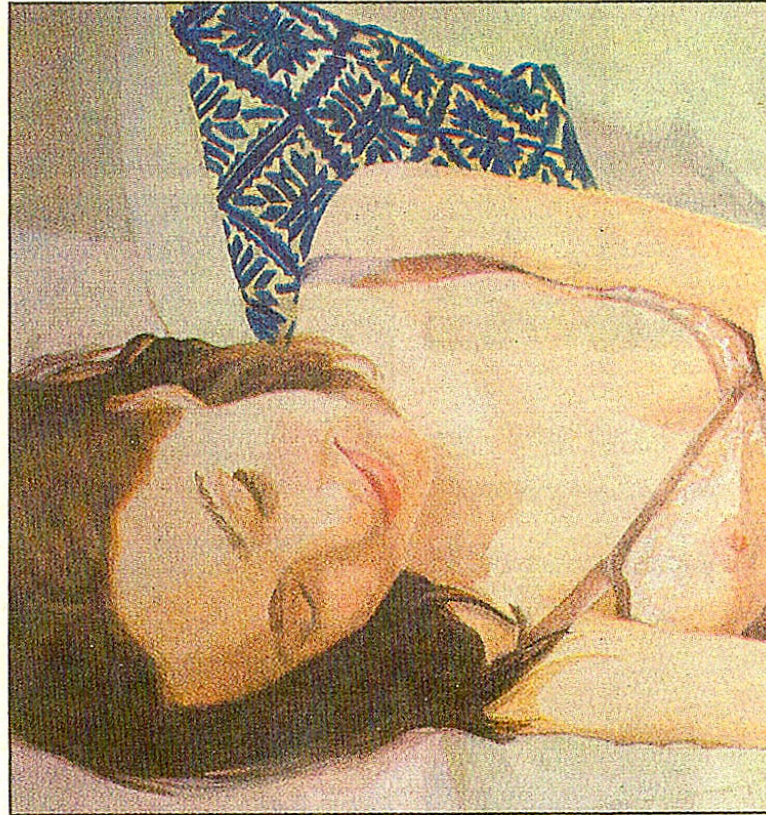


Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Young Gallery

Sarah Kurz' 'It Was Just Beautiful,' an oil painting, is a bright, intimate and warm element in an exhibit at Geoffrey Young Gallery.

present, is far more intriguing, and his earlier Scopophilia paintings had serious artistic and psychological content.

Duncan Hannah's drawings are curiosities. He appropriates the facile graphic style of those Walter Foster "How to Draw" books from

the 1950s, capturing their canned academic approach. His work is full of nostalgia and has a certain kitschy appeal.

Known for his organic abstractions, James Siena offers two post-card-sized drawings that have the delicacy of Dutch lacework, but

their subject is anything but soothing. Distorted male and female forms with pronounced genitalia float like alien corpses in tanks of fluid. Their attenuated, meandering limbs fill in the negative space.

The prize for most fascinating subject goes to Mark Greenwald's two drawn portraits of the renowned artist Chuck Close and his inamorata. Greenwald is a consummate draftsman working with bold, confident contours that rivet our attention. Slight exaggeration and distortions infuse the pieces with a hint of caricature, giving the principals a larger-than-life presence.

Jessica Hess and Sarah Kurz are talented, early career artists, and their naturalistic paintings distinguish them from the group. Hess is best known for her urban landscapes tattooed with graffiti. The show presents a nude self-portrait seated invertedly in a pink, curvilinear armchair — a veritable throne of femininity. In the background, four canvases rest against the studio wall. Nudes and interiors pose numerous challenges, but Hess adequately meets them.

Kurz's cropped images of women in lingerie are seductively intimate and thoroughly feminine in viewpoint. In her canvases, washes of color and light are synonymous, and touches of blue accents activate her flesh-tone palette.

These respective, well-drawn images of intimacy show true promise, and I recommend keeping an eye of Kurz's career.

BW