

LoCicero Juggles High and Low Art

GALLERIES

Kenneth Baker

For Bay Area painter Patrick LoCicero, who is showing several new works at the Braunstein Gallery, 250 Sutter Street through June 2, a picture is an enigma. This stance is a risky proposition in that it can easily be overdone and turn pretentious. His new pieces benefit from the fact that materials take over some of the work that his choice and conjunction of images used to do.

Like some earlier LoCicero works, the new ones confront us like flags, as if our response ought to be as immediate and rote as a salute. In their inability to be decoded, LoCicero's images contradict this foursquare pictorial address.

The most successful piece here, to my eye, is "Beach Balls." It presents two glowing, banded orbs side by side, with halations of light around them, on a ground of torn, found fabric mounted on stretched canvas. The fabric is criss-crossed with a pattern of raised stitches and decorated with ball fringe, which hangs from the bottom edge of the painting. The balls on the fringe are like a homely tribute to the radiant spheres on the surface above.

I took the painting for an abstraction before I read its title. It muses on the supposed distance between the "purity" of abstract art and the lowdown condition of ordinary life. Symbolically, the beach balls (echoed by the fringe) parallel eyeballs and testicles in what may be a joking confessional metaphor for the painter's own vision of the world.

The economy of "Beach Balls" is what makes it work. Other pieces here have their strong points but contrivance is too easily felt in them.

Elaine Reichek Cultural Knits

Sharing space with LoCicero at Braunstein is New Yorker Elaine Reichek.



Robert Crumb's 1972 cover of *Seed*, from his show at Modernism Gallery

— with the culture's big themes and with people's innermost preoccupations, from sex, glamour, vi-

olence and mysticism to get-rich-quick schemes and the terrors of the nuclear family and nuclear death.

Allow plenty of time to see his show of original cartoon art at Modernism, 685 Market Street (through June 23), for there is more reading to do here than in a show of conceptual art. At least Crumb's writing always delineates a world, usually a world where his hand and imagination rule. Not everyone — himself included, I would surmise — is comfortable in such a world, but everyone ought to visit it once.

Crumb is at his weakest when depicting a world not his own, as in the series here illustrating the sex-perversion studies of Kraft-Ebbing (though it too has its moments of graphic inspiration).

Abstract Works At Modernism

Dramatically out of step with Crumb's vision are the two other artists showing at Modernism, Da-

vid Trowbridge and Soviet painter Konstantin Titov.

Trowbridge makes abstract paintings that consist of individually stretched canvases, each painted a single color, to which joins flat slabs of wood. The slabs are cut directly from tree panels and their eccentric profiles make a vivid contrast to the geometry colored squares and rectangles.

This jamming together of the organic (the wood grain reminiscent of Max Ernst's "frottage" rubbings) and the geometric, haunted by utopian idealism, is an old school idea that should not have graduated.

In Konstantin Titov's paintings robotic-looking nude women (and the occasional statue) meet geometric solids — cones and pyramids — in a metallic darkness that withholds all details of context and intent. An air of what might be called cyborg prurience pervades these pictures and makes the haunting, despite their obvious theatricality.