

It was the American dream

Patrick LoCicero's work evokes the humble dignity of immigrants seeking new life in their adopted land

By ROBIN UPDIKE • *Seattle Times art critic*

Patrick LoCicero's paintings and collages take a few minutes to absorb, and those who glance too quickly into Grover/Thurston Gallery this month and see nothing but mossy, smudgey paintings will miss the lovely melodies in this suite.

In one of the best pieces in this compelling exhibition, LoCicero uses layers of dark oil paint and varnish that swirl around the canvas like a brackish pool of water. In the center of the canvas is a small, old-fashioned, camel-backed sofa with floral upholstery, exactly the sort of sofa that ambitious, early-20th-century European immigrants to the United States would have wanted for their Brooklyn or Queens apartment.

The sofa is dignified, solidly middle-class, a comfortable and hospitable seat for visitors. Behind it is the image of a cooking range, also from the 1920s. The range is pitched onto its side. Seen together, the two pieces suggest domesticity but also cramped quarters, as though these important household goods have frequently been moved from apartment to apartment as their owners have sought a better life and a bigger home.

Like images fleetingly visible in pools of dark water, profiles of a man and woman appear in the top half of this painting, if you take the time to look. They are surely the owners of this furniture, the people who left their countries to find the American dream.

Other paintings in the group he calls "Home-steading" include small images of lawn mowers and cigarette packs. It's easy to imagine a first-generation Italian American, cigarette dangling from his mouth, dutifully trying to be an American head-of-the-household and mowing a strip of grass on Saturday afternoon.

Elsewhere in the show, small images of old valises sit like tiny toys in much larger backgrounds. The diminutive size of the valises underscores the point that immigrants came into the big new land of America with few material possessions but with hopes so large that they could not be contained in suitcases.

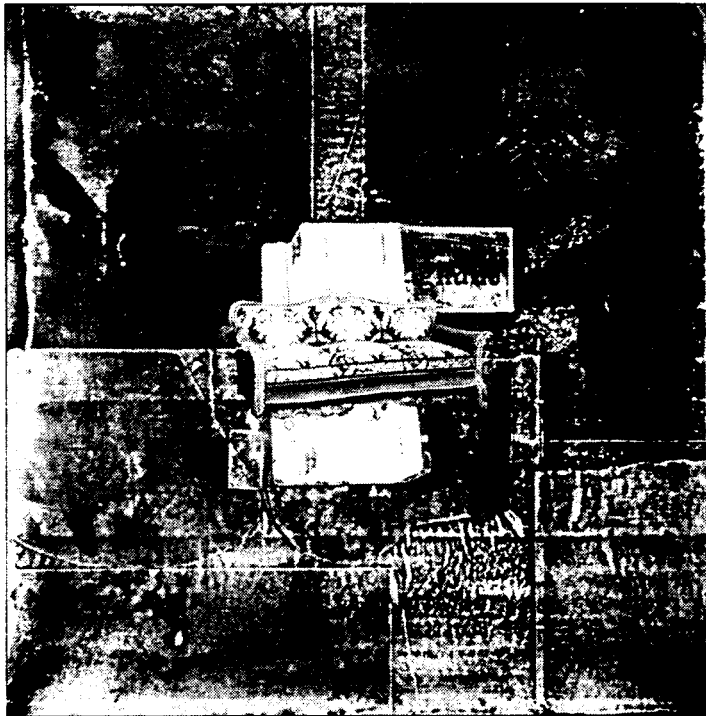
For his first show in Seattle, LoCicero, a former New Yorker who now lives here, has created a group of paintings and collages that manages to be intimate, sentimental and elegant without

becoming cloying or predictable. His layered style suggests memory and nostalgia. And though his own grandparents came from Italy, his themes of immigration and the hard work required to build a new life in a new land are universal.

Spotlight on Russian painters

Davidson Galleries has a history of showing figurative paintings by highly skilled artists from Russia. The gallery made connections with the first of its Russian artists a decade ago when Seattle was the site of the U.S./Soviet Goodwill Games and cultural exchange.

But Davidson Galleries has continued to add to its stable of Russian painters, and this



month it's showing the work of two artists it has not previously exhibited.

Ilya Zomb and Vladimir Kush are gifted oil painters who create accomplished, expertly detailed canvases. But what makes their work intriguing is their surreal subject matter. Zomb has a fondness for ballerinas in odd, weirdly storybook settings. His work is full of allegory and fairy-tale metaphor.

Kush's work is gothic with a sci-fi point of view. In his two best paintings he has armies of tiny people building huge monsters. "Cybernetic Assemblage" shows teensy ant-people working on a gigantic, slime-green chameleon inside what looks like a 19th-century exhibition hall. Will the monster be a scientific display? Or a terror machine? Either way, it's quite a delightful painting.

VISUAL ARTS REVIEW

"Patrick LoCicero: The Nostalgia Suite"

Runs through Aug. 23 at Grover/Thurston Gallery, 309 Occidental Ave. S.; 206-223-0816.

"Paintings by Andrei Karpov, Ilya Zomb, and Vladimir Kush"

Through Sunday at Davidson Galleries, 313 Occidental Ave. S.; 206-624-7684.

GROVER/THURSTON GALLERY

"Sofa" by Patrick LoCicero recalls the solidly middle-class domestic dreams of European immigrants to the United States in the 1920s.