

"Pictures" at an exhibition

By KAREN ANDREWS

Had Confucius attended the Allen Art Museum's latest exhibit, entitled "Pictures," he might have been inspired to reiterate his famous maxim "One picture worth 1000 Words." What these five up-and-coming contemporary artists are dealing with may be nothing new; but, their approach and innovations are thoroughly modern.

The catalog speaks of semiotics, paradigmatic expressions, the signification that lies beneath the image, but don't let that scare you: the exhibit requires nothing more than that you see the pictures with your own eyes, preferably armed with an open mind.

Bow wow

You may be surprised to see a movie projector and a phonograph sitting in the middle of the room, and if you come at either 2:30 or 4:00, you'll be in time for Jack Goldstein's quick flicks, which include, among other things, a dog that barks into the camera for three minutes, a knife that changes color, and someone tracing a Van Gogh. The artist's intention has been to strip the image of all but the bare essentials, the residual image that remains in your memory after the picture is no longer there. Goldstein is also responsible for what several random museum-goers thought were the most powerful works in the exhibition, a series called "Pull" which depicts bodies falling in space.

Pictures are a universal part of any culture, and as such, they have a definite role in shaping our lives. Especially in our modern, international society, where we are struck daily by images on TV, in newspapers, magazines, and movies, it is the belief of the artists that a substantial portion of our experience of reality comes through the indirect and in fact distancing means of images.

Frozen film

Robert Longo is especially interested in cinema and its effect on us. He's been experimenting with freezing the motion picture, and his works are unusual sculpture/reliefs (that defy classification), which he calls stills, from movies such as "Missouri Breaks" and "The American Soldier."

Another theme that the artists have been approaching is that of how the mind makes its associations. How does it make sense out of what is inherently chaotic? Philip Smith's three-part pastel and pencil drawings consist of tracings of fairly recognizable images which seem to be pictures from magazines, stories and photographs. However, they find themselves in no apparent order, which reminds the viewer of the

way in which his mind works . . . leaping from one unconscious association to the next. There is also something reminiscent of hieroglyphics in this work.

Presidential profiles

Sherrie Levine's "Sons and Lovers" deals with similar problems. Hers is a series of 28 fluorescent tempera drawings of ambiguously placed profiles that the viewer ecstatically identifies with those of Lincoln, Washington, and Kennedy. However, there is a basic incongruity among the images, and hence, it is up to the viewer to invent some kind of narrative, to connect the dots (so to speak).

Finally, one of the most striking pieces in the show is Troy Brauntuch's "1, 2, 3," which are photosilkscreens of three of Hitler's most frequently reproduced drawings, set in a blood-red background. Even without any explanation, these are spine-tingling works.

In short, despite this particular exhibit's controversialness, it contains some beautiful works of art, well worth seeing. In the meantime, it raises many solid questions concerning the nature and role of images in our lives.