

Entertainment/Arts

'Pictures' Exhibit Far From Realistic

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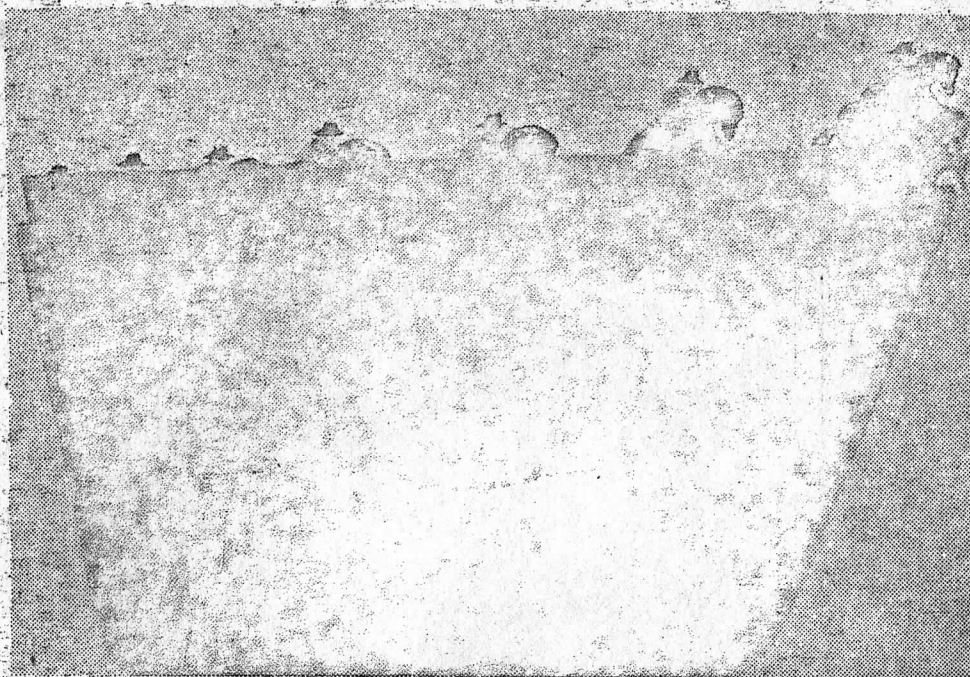
For the Camera

"Pictures," an exhibition currently showing at the Fine Arts Gallery of the University of Colorado Museum, makes an interesting point: realism can be highly abstract.

Though the work of the five artists on exhibit presents imagery that is generally recognizable, very little of it actually looks like a picture in the traditional sense of the word. A "picture" generally connotes something anecdotal or story-like which fills an imaginary three-dimensional space with a frame around it.

Such pictures are not found here. What greets the viewer instead is a passionless space dotted with images randomly plucked from the vast and chaotic vocabulary of mass media.

Clearly, the roots of these New York artists lie in popular media such as film, television and the daily newspaper with its anonymous UPI and AP photographs. But beyond sharing many of the same sources, there is little else that connects these artists with the pop artists of the Sixties. Whereas artists like Andy Warhol or Roy Lichtenstein drew on the obviously sensual, garish and



Robert Longo's "Seven Seals for Missouri Breaks" is an aluminum sculpture, on exhibit as part of "Pictures."

tease your mind as you stare at these beautifully colored photograph records.

A near-by phonograph, surrounded by copies of these same records, is available as a balm to the overly-curious. I listened to "The Burning Forest," and the first half of "The Six Minute Drown." Indeed, the former did sound like a forest burning out of

guy." A piece of tracing paper barely reveals beneath it what appears to be a postcard size reproduction of Vincent Van Gogh's 1887 painting of the naive and eccentric art patron. While a hand using a black marking pen swiftly and deftly traces the main outlines of the composition, your ear is caressed by the amplified sound of the

Brauntuch's work, like that of Goldstein, draws its ambiguous strength from the ubiquitousness of the photograph. Working with the photograph both as an artificial emblem and as a familiar psychic texture, Brauntuch creates a world of highly refined nuances.

The problem with Brauntuch's approach is that his points of reference, as well as his aesthetic intent, are too discreet and esoteric. Because he is so successful at what he sets out to do, the alienated world his works so sublimely describe becomes even more alienated.

Exemplifying the diversity in the use of different media by these artists are the sculptures of Robert Longo. He works in painted cast aluminum. His imagery is very Hollywood. "Seven Seals for Missouri Breaks - Let's Go to the Hills and Join the Gurillas," depicts seven identical cowboys slowly - as in movie picture frames - rising above a cast aluminum horizon. In "Say Goodbye to Hollywood," a floor sculpture, Longo gives us a black dog lying atop of what could easily pass as a giant pool of cast aluminum blood.

"Pictures" is not a popular show. The message is diffi-

media: Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Robert Longo, Sherrie Levine and Philip Smith draw from the more subtle and subliminal aspects of contemporary media. There is a world of disconnected, alien imagery, a cool, flat territory where space has both ceased to exist and yet has expanded infinitely.

The major source accounting for the abstract quality of "Pictures" is the highly intellectual and non-pictorial realm of minimal sculpture and concept art. Critic Douglas Crimp, who organized this show, claims "Pictures" reestablishes the traditions of symbolism and surrealism. If that is the case, the current crop of "imagists" shows little of the passion, sensuality and emotional excess of their predecessors. What is evident is not so much surrealism as serial realism. The dominant unifying factor among these artists is the notion that our understanding of life happens in fragmented series of media bits.

The most intriguing, humorous and aesthetically interesting artist on display is Jack Goldstein. Working with photography, film and sound, Goldstein has created a unique world. His sense of humor is cool, bordering on black, but he does have one. And for all of his conceptual pretension, he also possesses an actual aesthetic sensibility: a sense of color form and structure that is pleasing.

Surprisingly enough, this sensibility comes across very well in the unusual display of 10 individually framed 45 rpm records. Each a different color, these records bear titles which could only have sprung from a wit as unsparing as the knife which must make the necessary amputations. "Burning Forest," "Two Wrestling Cats" and "The Six Minute Drown"

sounded very much like someone taking six minutes to drown.

Satisfied with the taste of Goldstein's taste in 45 rpm sound, I decided I would pass up listening to the four handsomely displayed 33 1/3 rpm discs bearing such intriguing titles as "The Quivering Earth." It seems better to respect such concept pieces by allowing them to twist and bend the mind in their own time.

Stark and startling is Goldstein's photographic essay, "The Pull." Set within unmodulated, pale but soothing fields of color are minute floating figures, one on each of the three photos. The first two are recognizable as divers. The third is an upside down astronaut with miniscule umbilical cord floating freely. These extremely tiny and shadowy shapes are intelligible only because television has so completely transformed the civilized imagination.

Goldstein's films, which you can view upon request, are similar to a string of conceptual 45 rpm recordings for the eye. "Shane" is a close-up of a barking German shepherd. "MGM" is literally that, the MGM lion roaring catatonically. "Bone China" depicts a red-and-yellow bird flying in circles and chirping furiously over a plate. "Chair" and "Knife" respectively play with pieces of colored material falling about a chair, and a knife which colored lights transform into a streamlined piece of pop archeology.

But the unquestioned masterpiece of these film tidbits is "Portrait of Pere Tan-

way across the tracing paper. Oscar Wilde declared that nature imitates art. In the post-modernist world of the late Seventies, "Portrait of Pere Tanguy" certainly stands as a perfect example of art imitating art, and most artfully at that.

In contrast to the minimalist realism of Goldstein, Phil-

What Smith rather successfully evokes is a population of semi-digested media personalities inhabiting a shadowy neural battle-zone someplace between sleep and utter oblivion.

Playing more delicately with a similarly disconcerting approach to imagery is the work of Troy Brauntuch.

exhibit sits on the razor's edge between cleverly commenting on itself, and offering some unpleasant but truthful reflections on ourselves and the world we've created. And that in itself may give one pause for thought.

"Pictures" will be on exhibit through Oct. 7.