

GALLERIES



From Back/Bring/Spine by Philip Smith

Every picture tells
a story, don't it?

By GORDON McCONNELL

The current exhibition in Henderson Museum, titled *Pictures*, comes to Boulder from Artists Space, a non-profit gallery in New York City. Organized with subtle acumen by critic Douglas Crimp and accompanied by a helpful if somewhat sclerotic catalog, *Pictures* introduces five relatively unknown artists and represents a notable attempt to define the nature of picture-making in the Post-Surrealist, Post-Pop, Post-Conceptual Seventies.

Sherrie Levine's large display of 36 drawings on graph paper, *Sons and Lovers*, is perhaps the most extreme example of schematic representation to be found in this collection of mostly unrealistic images. Her quivering fluorescent colors, applied in checkerboard patterns to gridded paper, remind one of the radiant matrix of color television. This strident coloration is used to delineate an extremely limited set of images: the silhouettes of Presidents Kennedy, Washington and

Lincoln, derived from the emblematic profiles on our coins, and equally banal profiles of a young woman, a couple, and two different dogs. Various combinations of these abstract but connotative diagrams are paired in each of the 36 drawings to suggest dialogs. Varying otherwise only in scale and orientation and presented in a diagrammatic context, these extremely formal images bear a close (and humorous) relationship to Conceptual Art (like Sol-LeWitt's) which focuses on permutational relationships.

THE WORKS OF Troy Brauntuch are equally inaccessible in emotional terms. His delicately nostalgic reveries, treasures of the ephemeral, are occluded instead by a secretive, privatist sensibility. He is a slight, recessive, poetic art, as frail as the folded sheet of black paper which stirs, dances really, in air currents generated by the approaching viewer. Bearing on one leaf the photograph of

continued on page 21

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continued from page 20

two ballet dancers, the folded sheet is flanked by black sheets with the words "Applause" and "Ballet Dancers" printed on them. Surely the movement of the folded leaves suggests the danced dialog, as well as the clapping hands of the audience. One is enveloped in an aura of sweet longing comparable to the atmosphere of paralyzed desire and melancholy which permeates Joseph Cornell's delicate constructions.

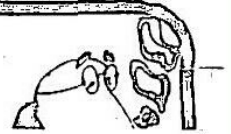
BRAUNTUCH'S large, pale, untitled print of a Classical Greek bust seems likewise remote and unobtainable; lost on a plane of clear white, as abstract and imponderable as time and perfection. While the sources and identities of this and other Brauntuch works are obscure, Douglas Crimp's catalog essay discloses the connection between three silkscreened reproductions of drawings on large red fields — a tank, a stage set, and the vestibule of a public building — they are all from the hand of Adolph Hitler, a man whose tentative youthful vocation is obliterated for us by the magnitude of his later sins. Here Brauntuch seems to communicate both conventional

fascination and loathing for the man and a particularly poignant sense of regret.

Surely one of the most unique of the artists who derive plastic images from photographic sources is Robert Longo, a sculptor. Each of his cast aluminum reliefs seems founded on one salient characteristic of the photograph — that it makes an object of a moment in time. Longo's photo-derived pieces concretize the photograph as the photograph objectifies the ephemeral moment. Two of his pieces particularly exemplify this. One, *The American Soldier and the Quiet Schoolboy*, depicts a man in tie and hat arched against the plane of the wall, apparently struck from behind by a bullet. Stopped at the moment of death, as life stops, as the camera stops, he seems transfixed at Elliot's "still point of the turning world."

ANOTHER RELIEF by Longo called *Opening Scene: "A Screaming Comes Across the Sky"* juxtaposes Millet's *The Sower* with the opening sentence of Thomas Pynchon's ponderous but imaginatively rich novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*.

continued on page 22

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continued from page 21

ty's Rainbow. The unfortunate sower, white against white, seems to be at ground zero, frozen in suspension as the terrible unseen rocket poises overhead. Longo could hardly have appropriated richer literary or artistic material than he has here.

In *Leap/Move I and II* and *Back/Bring/Spins*, Philip Smith has crowded huge pieces of paper with numerous renderings of diverse subjects. His artfully crude traced outlines of projected images seem to bear a similar technical relationship to the lapidary refinement of Photorealist works as Impressionist paintings did to Salon paintings of the 19th century. Smith has taken only the first sketchy step in the process of realist picture-making. Rejecting further refinement, he relies on the ill-informed suggestiveness of his pictures to engage the viewer. Here a magician taking the head from a crinolined Victorian lady or sawing another lady in two is juxtaposed with images of sculptors and bowlers, baseball players and dancers. Images from children's books, and photographs, cartoons and Japanese prints from our media-choked world are reduced to equivalence in rough compositions of pencil outline and smeared white or monochrome pastel.

The fifth artist in the show,

the smoothest (or slickest) and my candidate for artist-most-likely-to, is Jack Goldstein. His uses of different media are extremely smart and attractive, his concepts seamless. *The Pull* is a set of three photographs, each one featuring a tiny human figure: a scuba diver, a skydiver (or suicide), and an astronaut-spacewalker. Each figure finds its place on a blank color field tinted to suggest (in order) aqua blue water, turquoise air, and grey outer space. Compared with the suspension of the other two figures, one truly feels "the pull" of gravity and mortality acting on the man who falls.

GOLDSTEIN'S other works in film and audio recordings are, in the gallery context, very interesting and entertaining although I doubt the music critics who howled with outrage at Lou Reed's album of industrial noise would give much space to Goldstein's simulations of a forest fire, a drowning or a cat fight. These and other 45 rpm recordings are pressed in appropriately colored vinyl, but their display on the wall as aesthetic objects/cultural artifacts seems inappropriate.

The interrelationships between these artists in approach, subject matter and their varying orientations to tradition provide much of the interest of this very interesting show.
