

ART

Drawn and Quartered

William Zimmer

Artists Draw
Artists Space
105 Hudson St.
(through Feb. 10)

Artists Space presents a continuing series of exhibitions selected by artists. It is often absorbing to see what other art moves an artist because it can be presumed he has a vested esthetic interest in his selections. His choices say something about his own work — and when you can't perceive a connection, that's interesting too; a reminder that an artist doesn't have to wear blinders.

Donald Sultan, whose work will become better known soon via the Whitney Biennial and a solo show at the Willard Gallery, is the guiding hand behind the current show. The strength his selections share, according to his catalog statement, is the welding of idea to form. From the evidence, I take this to mean definite and unpretty subject matter executed boldly. Such a predilection is apt for an artist who can coax poignant, romantic seascapes out of such rude materials as linoleum tile and tar. It should also be said that many of the drawings are several years old, which lends credibility to Sultan's statement that his selections have been important to him.

Auste Peciura betrays her Chicago origins by the elastic misshapeness of her characters. They are like the figures of Jim Nutt but never that off-putting. And there is a "just kidding folks" feeling when she entitles a drawing *Mock Crucifixion* or *Mock Suicide*. Her best works have a Thurber-like charm about them; she ex-

cels' at outline and at filling up the page. But there is always a distracting element — the jaggedness of her character Constance's clothes or the "thorn dress" her Therionthorpe (beast in human form) wears.

Where Peciura's forte is bold Outline, Patti Smith whips strands of colored line to form. Her work has a frazzled, electric hot quality appropriate to her sexual themes. There are two whose subject is fellatio. A line is sometimes a string of words. The best Smith drawings have a lot of generalized activity at the periphery and then zoom in on a detail, such as a devilish grin. It's like finding the eye of a hurricane. Two forlorn drawings of a decade ago, *A Goat Talks to God* and *The Sun Never Sets, It Disappears*, are a more childlike style than her current crackling mode.

The third in Sultan's trio of formidable women is Nancy Spero. She is also currently exhibiting new work at A.I.R., but here she is showing work from the 1960s. It is searing work responding to the climate of Vietnam with titles such as *Bomb and Victims*, or *Victims on Helicopter Blades*. The Stylized bombs and blades cut across the paper, but the heads with tongues of fire that are the victims are like apparitions. There is a lot of watercolor wash about them so they look like grave rubbings.

If Spero's drawings are the most agonizing, Alan Saret's are the most elevating. Many of the titles contain the lovely term "ensoulment," which I take to be a variation of embodiment. He records the essence of a thing over its physical appearance. This sounds mystical and

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Auste Peciura's *Constance's Glove Is Falling*

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ephemeral but his working method is not. His most striking works are "gang drawings" — a fistful of pencils make the marks in concert. The best are rich networks of ganglia that flare up on the otherwise blank paper.

Tom Martin's drawings are like movie stills and his shading has a moviehouse flicker. There are emblematic filmic scenes such as a Joan Crawford character leaning against a mantelpiece, and a pair of private eyes looking through a venetian blind. But the most heart-rending drawing is of a 3-year-old Jerome Martin. The kid clutches his forehead in a world-weary gesture. And he's only just begun.

There's always a lot on the menu at Artists Space. R.M. Fischer serves up a selection of homemade "art" lamps. George Kovacs is currently running a TV commercial with giggles when his silly looking lamps are shown. By that standard, Fischer's creations inspire guffaws. There are giant ones — a Deco number looms like a streetlight and another is almost a robot with flexible neck lamps for arms. Then there is the delicate lamp on a wrought iron stand with three curlicued legs. It has a cunning, tiny shade and the cord aspires to be a fourth leg as it loops from the floor to the plug.

The environments in Laurie Simmons colored photographs are composed of dollhouse furniture — the most intricately wrought I've ever seen, even down to the contents of a grocery bag. Because photography can render reality and artifice the same scale, Simmons' work toys with your perceptions. It might be real except for her people. The average American is not yet that plastic-looking.

Pieter Holstein's *Waterfall* is an unfurled roll of gridded-up canvas sloping from ceiling to floor. Each square contains a black-and-white image, some explicitly sexual and some abstract configurations whose gestalt is sexual. The sheer volume of pictures reminds one of Joe Brainard. The waterfall allusion is that the pictures don't individually hold your attention; you see them in waves and specificity blurs. ●