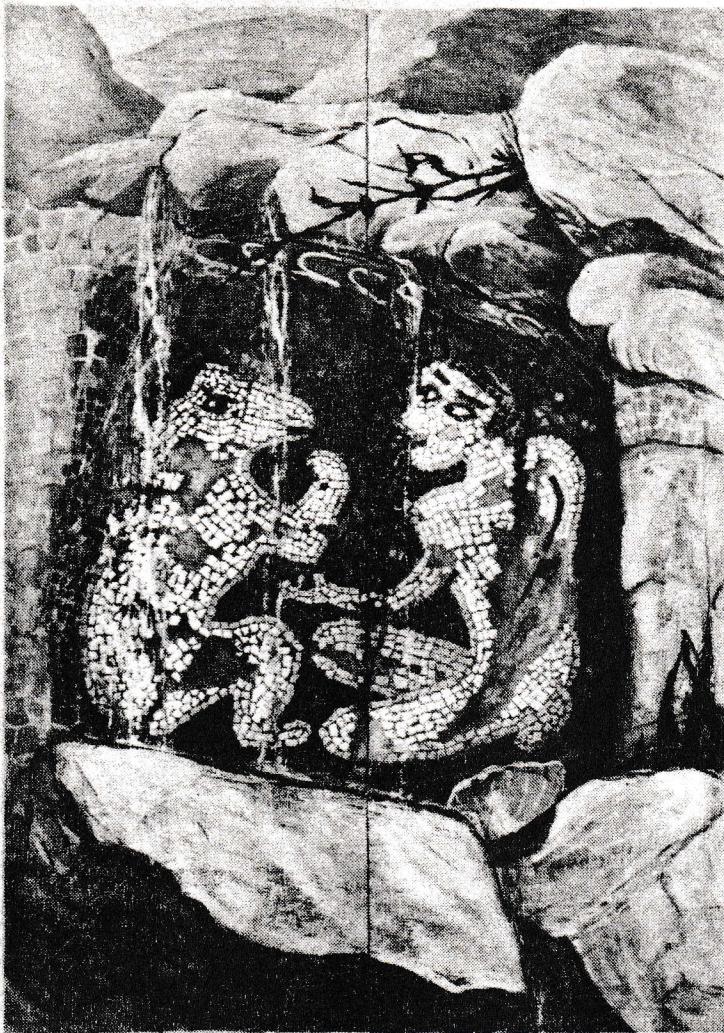


L.A.
Art Seen



Judith Simonian, *Nancy and Pierre*, 1984.

First Newport Biennial, 1984: Los Angeles Today

"Pluralistic," "eclectic," "diverse" . . . all such adjectives can be applied to this show of seven L.A. artists: David Amico, Judy Simonian, Jill Giegerich, Michael Kelley, Tony Berlant, Ed Moses, and Charles Garabedian. The curators, Paul Schimmel and Tom Heller, wanted to present an overview of what was happening that they felt noteworthy in this city. Unlike William Wilson, my colleague at the *Times*, I don't think there's a neo-expressionist in this group, which crosses three generations of working artists. If

anything connects them, it is a common concern with the issues of traditional painting, an attempt to enliven — maybe to reinvent — the stuff of art history.

Kelley may be the exception, with a series of drawings of a scatalogical nature. They derive from a recent excursion to Australia and reflect wild and wooly thoughts that both appeal to and repel similar musings of the viewers. By far the most ribald works in the show, with the most ribald catalogue essay, they drew almost obsessive attention at the opening.

Simonian has incorporated ceramic tiles in her paintings of flowing water and nostalgic scenes that recall 18th-century idylls. Both the tiles and the people are contemporary,

however — they're available from Builder's Emporium — and they seem to long for the romance of another time.

Amico shares Simonian's concerns in the most unabashedly romantic paintings he has executed to date, beautiful paintings with a fulsome, luscious buoyancy. The "Railback Series" are among the most moving works I have seen in recent years, maybe since Amico last showed here. Their poetry is the more effective for all the doubts the artist obviously feels about the validity of such concerns. There is a reserve, a self-critical edge, that empowers these pictures.

Giegerich is one of the most talented of L.A.'s younger artists and it is unfortunate that she is represented rather weakly in this show. In her drawings, cut-out shapes of teapots, and constructivist works in wood, there is a hint of what a good showing might be like, but the work on view is decidedly wan. Certain wall reliefs by Giegerich can send a current up your spine that will brand itself in your unconscious. Unfortunately, none of those works is in this show. (The teapot is nice, however.)

The older artists in the show are even less compelling. Berlant's wilted tin doors, boxes, and framed works are pleasant and attractive, but on the whole, rather dull.

Garabedian is represented by figurative paintings and drawings that allude, characteristically, to ancient Greece and the classics, but these are just not the best Garabadians in the world. They look overworked, fussy and stiff. Moses can be a stunning abstract painter, and at first glance his installation — a fence which encloses nothing, slashed with powerful strokes of green, red and black — is gripping. In the wood are the cut-out shapes of spiders, combined with tar-covered black spiders, both utterly superfluous, a last-minute addition of who-knows-what to the scene.

For the most part, however, this is one of the most interesting shows in town. It is the first in a series of biennial exhibitions to be sponsored by the museum; we look forward to the next installment. (Newport Harbor Art Museum, through November 25).

—Hanter Drohojowska

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