

L.A. Art Scan**Margaret Nielsen at Asher/Faure Gallery**

In Margaret Nielsen's earlier paintings, male-female relationships were related by obvious if appealing symbols, such as a man's fedora or a woman's high-heeled shoe. Martinis and matches were thrown about in those paintings, though the violence was always rendered in shades of pastel. In her current show, the allegories as well as the colors have grown darker. They are closer to Joseph Conrad than Colette in their exploration and search of passion, with images often emerging out of a vortex of swirling scarlet and black. All are about four by five inches, and read sequentially, the images and titles build an oblique narrative. A series of small fires around a canoe is *Ritual Bath*; the canoe about to enter the open flap of a tent is *Admission*; a man trying to straddle a galloping deer is *Extenuating Circumstances*; a pair of massive trees bound together by a rope is

**Accord by Margaret Nielsen.**

titled *Accord*; a woman in the canoe with a fire is *Afterglow*. Each of these obscure little pictures packs a psychological wallop that may entice and intrigue us with mystery; the titles might be chosen with the same poetic restraint.

Annunciation, depicting a meteor falling toward earth and few men huddled around a campfire, seems too obvious, as does *Communion*, which

portrays a man with a rifle aiming at a burning bush. The paintings lose some of their precious arcane complexity after such explanation, whether it's to be taken literally or not. Aside from that, the pictures on the whole represent a new level of sophistication for Nielsen, evocative haunting obsessions, of the dark night of the soul. (through December 29).

—Hunter Drohojowska

Leon Kossoff at L.A. Louver Gallery

Leon Kossoff is a veteran British painter, and this survey of his landscapes, portraits and studies from the Old Masters reveals his uncanny ability to capture the ambience of his homeland. The impastoed surfaces are thick as pudding,

rutted and torn, in colors ranging from gray to rust. You can practically feel the cold, wet wind slicing along the streets, pressing the pedestrians, whose heads are bowed, together.

There are two paintings titled *School Building Willesdon* — the scene is a hulking factory of red brick, towers undaunted in the oppressive, cheerless atmosphere — and the scene is virtually unchanged, whether painted in

winter of 1981 or spring of 1983. (In the latter, there is one small swatch of green in one budding tree, but it doesn't much alleviate the overall somber quality.)

The people in Kossoff's pictures are of a piece with the entire scene, hewn out of the impasto with awkward, angular brushstrokes. They are glued to the backgrounds as they are stuck with their life positions; they are expressionless, resigned to their fates. In paintings such as *Bus Stop* or *A Street in Willesdon*, they practically fade away. An exception is the picture *Breakfast*, an image of domestic serenity removed from the prevailing anguish of the outside world. (Kossoff's self-portraits are the most fully realized character studies.)

Kossoff's interest in academic painting — evidenced in his studies after Rubens, Rembrandt and Poussin — assure us that his interests are far from those of social realism, however, and are definitely tied to issues of paint-handling. Something he does very well. (through December 15.)

**Breakfast by Leon Kossoff.**

—Hunter Drohojowska