

ENTERTAINMENT

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2004 THE YEAR IN VISUAL ARTS

Chihuly show dominates local arts scene

The blockbuster Reading Public Museum exhibition, featuring world-class glass art by the reclusive artist, put Reading on the national art map. But the work of several local artists often reached unexpected levels of accomplishment.

By Ron Schira

Reading Eagle Correspondent

Looking back on 2004, the schools, businesses and art organizations that exhibited the visual arts, a term that includes painting, sculpture, photography, computer graphics, drawing, collage, assemblage — or just about anything for us to look at — have continued to support the work of individual artists. And, if you recall, almost all of the recent exhibits have been solo shows, pairings or small group exhibits.

This is a good thing, the point being that artists risk the possibility of getting lost in one after another group show while the importance of whatever statement they make is removed from context by the curatorial or directorial desire to fit the work into a theme — and then, only cursorily admired.

Some art organizers recognize this, such as James Carroll (New Arts Program) or Christopher Youngs (Freedman Gallery), and are actively investigating the role of the director/curator by delegating the task to a concerned artist and allowing them



"Soul Connections" by Deb Schlouch, at the Grandview Gallery.

to pick and choose who participates in a given exhibit.

"Four by Four by Four," curated by artist Linda Francis at New Arts in Kutztown, for instance, and "Dan Schimmel plus Five" at the Freedman Gallery adequately illustrates that premise, which appears to be on the rise with similar shows



Katie Creyts' "My Stepsister's Glass Slippers," at Canal Street.

being scheduled as we speak.

Another trend that is making its way not only through the arts is the move toward the production and acquisition of the well-made object. Crafts, ceramics and glass in particular, have been very well received by collectors who are more willing to pay top dollar for something that carries a better investment.

Which brings us to the top show of the year, "Dale Chihuly: a Celebration in Glass." Shown at the Reading Public Museum over the summer, this exhibit was a blockbuster, displaying numerous examples of the world-famous glass blower and his team's repertoire, which had included a huge tower of glass erected within the museum atrium.

The museum also hit a homer with "Oxymorons: Absurdly Logical Quilts," a traveling exhibit of sewn artworks that used contradictory terms combined with finely executed craft in order to create humorous but dazzling works in fabric. The museum then presented us with the works of artists Kristen Woodward, Yadira Torres and Marilyn Fox in the recent "Berks Now" series.

The Institute of the Arts Yocum Gallery in Wyomissing was quite active in the past months with excellent solo shows by Patricia Reeder, Sarah Gibson, Barton Henderson, Marilyn Fox (a busy year for Marilyn), and further down that craft avenue, the glass sculptures of RKS Glass Studio and the abstract quilts of Mary Stout.

Also at the Institute, a valiant attempt was made by the Berks Art Alliance to recover the pieces of the Annual Juried Exhibit that for 26 years was seen at the Reading Public Museum. Since the show can now only be scheduled every other year and there was no time to find another location, the normally expansive show needed to make serious adjustments in size and consequently lacked cohesiveness.



Dale Chihuly's "Baskets," at the Reading Public Museum.

Of the best shows that took place, the Freyberger Gallery of Penn State Berks-Lehigh Valley College contributed the oversized ceramic sculptures of Rafael Canizares and the "mud" paintings of Peter Kinney, who literally scooped handfuls of colored dirt mixed with painting medium atop canvas after canvas in his own version of "landscape."

I also enjoyed the abstract sculptures of Doris Sams and Jason Messinger at the Freedman Gallery of Albright College, as well as the cerebral and ecological-minded installations of Warren Angle. The gallery, following last year's triumph with "Mexico Illuminated," had decided to keep the 645 Penn St. location and call it the Albright College Cultural Center. In late October, they re-opened with a college faculty exhibit; more on that operation in the coming months.

The Jewish Community Center

of Reading's Fromm Gallery presented us with solo exhibitions by artists Linda Henry, Charlene Jobe, Ineke Van Werkhoven, and currently Jane Runyeon.

In Kutztown, the New Arts Program offered the work of installation artist Sylvia Benitez, visual artist / photographer Gwenn Thomas and of course the Invitational Salon of Small Works. "Four by Four by Four," a three-month exhibition that was mentioned above, featured the work of abstractionists Lynne Harlow, Matthew Deleget, Rossana Martinez and Bibi Calderaro.

Other solo shows of merit included the work of painter Deb Schlouch at the Grandview Gallery of Wilson School District, abstract painter Karen Lesniak at the Canal Street Pub and Restaurant as well as the blown glassworks of Katie Creyts coupled with the patterned paintings of her older sister Maria

Creyts, also seen at Canal Street.

Art Plus Cooperative and the Berks Arts Council Gallery 20 continued to show quality work by the members of their respective groups and the downtown coffee shop City Espresso presented an excellent display of African-American Art for Black History Month. Reading Area Community College showed new work by Marie DeFilippis and the Berks Camera Club.

One can say that the year was dominated by two things, ugly wet weather and an even uglier presidential campaign. Thankfully the campaign is over, for better or worse, and behind us for another four years. As for the arts, well, the arts seem to be taking fewer risks and following the safer and more secure road. It may be a sign of the times.

Hopefully the weather will be kinder.

Contact Ron Schira at entertainment@readingeagle.com.



Reading Eagle, Sunday, December 6, 2004

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BY RON SHIRA, READING EAGLE CORRESPONDENT

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