

## ART

# Everyday Expectations With a Twist

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

**O**UR impression of 19th-century sailors is that they were regular guys, meat and potato types (on land, that is). One wonders what they would make of the ephemeral exhibition that occupies the old part of the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art at Snug Harbor on Staten Island, where old sailors used to retire.

Perhaps "Blood Remembering," the five-artist group show, would summon up the call of the siren. The show's curator, Tim Guest, who is a freelance curator and art critic, says the exhibition is "inspired by the body's virtual sensations" and "the sheererness of physical experience."

With this description, it is not surprising that the five installations are low on visual components. But it is an exhibition that grows in resonance the more you circumnavigate it.

The installation by Charles Ray simply titled "Table" is a Plexiglas-topped table with such items as a carafe and a bowl arranged on it so that at first you think you are seeing a Giorgio Morandi painting rendered as a transparent sculpture. But prodded by the notion that there has to be more, you eventually notice that the bottoms are cut out of the dishes; if you stick your hand in, it goes right through the table. This simple upsetting of everyday expectations produces a faint ache.

The purity of Mr. Ray's piece is met by the glossy white urinal sculp-

Two exhibitions are linked by a passageway that bears a message.

tured by Robert Gober for his untitled installation. Of course, a urinal in an art gallery is a comment on Marcel Duchamp and the beginnings of Dada, but Mr. Gober embroiders by including two mounted squares of linen on which flowers are painted. The pansy is intended to signal the derogatory appellation. This installation has much of Oscar Wilde's mordancy but little of his wit.

Patty Martori works solo for one installation that consists of a slender cabinet on a table, under which are a pillow against which is pressed a mock rifle. It's a strong totem pole about secrets and the chance of being found out.

In another work, with Jack Pierson, Ms. Martori has concocted a lewd picture out of photographs and flossam and jetsam about the lives of contemporary sailors to emphasize their persistent fringe existence.

Meanwhile, floating above these installations are seven wood sculptures

by Mary Carlson, depicting elementary eyes under lids. They are very stylized, especially black spheres under attenuated arches with some of the mystery of Egypt and the authority of the CBS logo.

In another show at the center, two Staten Island artists are having their first extended exposure. Both Robyn Ellenbogen and Alfredo Arcia are good painters, but the idiom in which Mr. Arcia works is more elastic and therefore more exciting right now. He is billed as a "visionary realist," and that is akin to the venerable Magic Realism.

Essentially, Mr. Arcia paints everyday life, but with a twist: his world is populated by tigers and lizards and by people who disrupt dinner parties by dancing on the table or by trying the trick of pulling off the tablecloth while leaving the dishes. He would concur that things are done with mirrors, for the mirror is a frequent device in his work.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Arcia, originally from Venezuela, is influenced by the Surrealism in Latin American fiction. To underscore that his vision is fictive, Mr. Arcia paints in a flickering manner, using subdued colors. It's ghostly work while remaining robust.

Ms. Ellenbogen is best seen as a lyrical abstractionist, but her lyrical line tends to be elegiac or solemn. She is expert at disciplining line so that it conjures up the "storms at sea and fires at night" advertised in the press release, or whirlpools, autumn leaves and a woman's breast. It is exciting to

declare that the whole world can be evoked out of one intense motion, but Ms. Ellenbogen needs to become more varied. Her drawings point the way to this.

Linking the two exhibitions, that of these painters and "Blood Remembering," is a narrow passageway with an abundance of windows. It is currently transformed into an installation with an expressly nautical theme, "At Sea" by Alan Michelson. Mr. Michelson is an artist in residence at Snug Harbor, and it is not hard to understand that his year there prompted an interest in the history of the place.

His installation is a simple one, but the poignancy is immediate. On either side of the passageway is a "photo transfer mural," which is essentially a photograph mounted on the window. One is a contemporary theme: homeless people congregated in Tompkins Square Park in Manhattan. On the other side is a 19th-century scene: sailors seated in the same passageway that is the locus of "At Sea" waiting for lunch.

Other, surrounding windows are covered with blue gel evoking the ocean. Mr. Michelson is saying succinctly that we're all riding on the same wave.

The Snug Harbor Cultural Center is at 1000 Richmond Terrace on Staten Island. The Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art is open from noon to 5 P.M. Sunday through Wednesday. The exhibitions all close on Jan. 6. ■



An untitled oil on canvas by Alfredo Arcia.

James T. Murray