The World of the Working Artist

New York January/February 2000

GALLERY&STUDIO

Joseph Beer, who was born in Poland in 1908, saw his first opera, "Der Prinz Von Schiras," premiered at the Zurich Opera House at age twenty-five. Like his second opera,"Polnische Hochzeit," which premiered two years later, it was set to a text by Vienna's foremost librettist Fritz Lohner-Beda. Both works won wide critical acclaim and were subsequently translated into eight languages and performed on some forty stages throughout Europe. But in 1938, when the Nazi government rose to power in Vienna, the brilliant young composer was forced to flee the city of his success. On the train to Paris, his suitcase, containing his concert tuxedo, his opera posters, and the clippings of all of his rave reviews—all the irreplaceable mementos of his former glory—was stolen...

The rest of Beer's story is a saga of hiding in hotel rooms as a refugee, working surreptitiously, eking out a living composing music for others to claim as their own, and having close encounters with and narrow escapes from the Nazis. The crowning blow was the death of his beloved parents and siblings in Auschwitz, from which he never recovered. After that cataclysmic event, while interest was shown in his work and one opera was performed as late as 1949, Beer withdrew and spurned most offers to present his music, preferring to compose only for his own solace.

So, what we have in the charismatic Ms. Beer's recital is the diva as devoted daughter, literally rescuing her father's music and reputation from the ashes with her moving and spirited renditions of his arias. Joseph Beer's melodies range from the romantic to the modernistic to the rhythmically jazzy, and Beatrice Beer does them all justice, with her beautiful voice and her animated gestures, employing her considerable acting ability in concert with her singing talent to convey the emotions inherent in the music and the lyrics.

It is said that when Joseph Beer first heard his first-born baby daughter cry, he declared that she would either be a fish monger or an opera singer, and while she clearly became the latter, she will stop at nothing to sell her father's songs.

Accompanied by the equally rollicking piano ministrations of Kelly Horsted, interspersed with dramatic biographical narration by a professional storyteller named Mary Rachel Platt, she literally sings her heart out— to press into service a well-worn cliche which in this case seems especially apt. Indeed, to paraphrase the narrative,

tribution that doubtless led to her inclusion in a major surrealist survey at the Guggenheim Museum. He also deserves credit for the major Stella Snead exhibition that will open on January 13, 2000, at Galerie Minsky, in Paris, since it is a follow-up to the "Rediscovery" show at CFM Gallery which launched her career anew. The Paris exhibition will include Snead's photo collages as well as her paintings.

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Aletha Zapf is a gifted and innovative young artist whose career we have been monitoring with considerable interest for quite some time. She first caught our attention in the 1997 "Talent" show at Allan Stone Gallery with a strong collage drawing incorporating bits of tape and showing the subtle spatial organization that would make itself even more evident in a group show later the same year at Ahra Lee Gallery on Broome Street, where she exhibited a spare, snaky minimalist sculpture in Crayola-slathered steel called "Orange." The following year, in the same venue, Zapf impressed us once again in a three artist show called "New Installation" with a piece consisting of three narrow elongated blue shapes that, for all their minimalistic simplicity, evoked the landscape and atmosphere of Greece.

More recently, in her first solo outing at Ahra Lee Gallery, Aletha Zapf again drew upon her travels to create a major installation inspired by a visit to Florence, Italy. Filling the entire gallery space, this piece consisted of large photographic images of people in streets and museums projected onto curtains that one walked through and was augmented by subdued audio tapes of street and crowd sounds that played off the casual nature of the images.

Although Ahra Lee Gallery is gradually gaining a reputation as one of the more innovative and exciting downtown venues (thanks in no small measure to the fact that Ahra Lee herself is a gallerist with a vision rather than merely an agenda), it is a relatively small space. However, the maze-like configuration of Zapf's installation transformed the gallery, creating a deceptive sense of spaciousness suggesting the feeling one has when moving through bustling city streets and the vast echoing halls of museums. On entering the gallery and moving through the curtains, the viewer got the sense of penetrating the crowds in the oddly impersonal way that

and Barbara LaVerdiere Bachner, two of our favorite New York artists, were chosen to represent the United States at the International Biennale of Contemporary Art, in Florence, Italy, in December. We are also pleased that "It Cuts Both Ways," a mixed sculpture that we reviewed favorably in an earlier issue of Gallery&Studio, when artist Susan Dorothea White exhibited it in her solo show at Montserrat Gallery in Soho, was recently purchased by the prestigious Hechinger Collection and exhibited at the National Building Museum in Washington D.C. Ditto for the major exhibition of works by Jay Milder at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Rio de Janiero, Brazil. Milder, who, along with Red Grooms, Bob Thompson, Bill Barrell and Christopher Lane, was one of the leaders of a group of innovative young figurative expressionist artists that emerged in the early sixties, dropped us a card to say he is also having another major museum show in Sao Paolo in February.

With the exception of Susan Dorothea White, who lives and works in Australia, all of the above-mentioned artists are longtime New Yorkers who are finally getting the international recognition they so richly deserve.

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Although the New York Times recently published an article about a young artist named Sean Avery Cavanaugh, it ran in the section called Health & Fitness and concerned a mysterious case of malaria that he contracted under unusual circumstances, rather than his solo exhibition, at Long Fine Art, 427 West 14th Street, which was still up when the piece appeared.

Cavanaugh has since recovered from his illness and is doing fine, thank you. But the real news, missed by the great gray Times, was that the work of this 30-year-old painter so impressed Stephen Long that one of the classiest dealers in the Meat Packing District decided to add him to a gallery roster that is otherwise dominated by abstract artists. And the gallerist made an excellent decision, for like Fairfield Porter, (who was for all intents and purposes an honorary member of the Abstract Expressionist movement, even though he specialized in genteel upper-middle-class genre scenes), Sean Avery Cavanaugh is a realist who can more than hold his own among abstract painters. Of course, one major difference between them is that while Porter always claimed that he became a realist in reaction to Clement Greenberg's