

A look at what went into the first curated GALA show

Art Looks At Our Lives

by Thom Cardwell

It isn't easy organizing a lesbian and gay art show these days. Just ask Jeanne Nugent, local artist/activist/writer on art, who served as guest curator for the GALA '91 (Gay and Lesbian Arts) exhibition, IDENTITIES, which closed on, June 7.

The exhibition—which presented the work of five regional artists: Harold Ivey, Marilyn Keating, Laura Markham, Gabriel Martinez, and Beverly Rhoads—“variously reflects a gay and lesbian sensibility,” according to Nugent.

Marking GALA's first curatorial effort in its four-year history, the selected works by these artists demonstrates, Nugent said, “a range of themes from the overtly political indictments of AIDS-ignorance, religious hypocrisy and

domestic violence to more abstract, sensual and traditional efforts.”

Primarily, though, this exhibition is about visibility. “A lot of discussion occurs these days in gay and lesbian circles about the importance of visibility to our acceptance by society at large,” she explained. Putting together an exhibition such as IDENTITIES became an assertive act, she said, since “we need to assert continued authority over our own aesthetic choices” in direct response to an ever-growing number of our cultural and political adversaries.

Which doesn't mean that all the works in IDENTITIES were confrontational. As Nugent wrote in the essay for the exhibition, “In grouping these five artists together based on a mutually affirmed sexual identity, I also hope for a more informed public appreciation of each artist's singular contribution to our diversity.”

Certainly, IDENTITIES received accolades. It was highly successful with its audience and the press. IDENTITIES received a basically favorable review from one of the regular art critics for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (no mean feat since GALA exhibitions have been ignored in the past by most of the local mainstream media).

Last year Nugent was approached by GALA Visual Arts Co-chairs Keith Breitfeller and Joel Kaylor about curating an arts exhibition

around the theme of gay sensibility as reflected in the works of lesbian and gay artists from the Philadelphia area. Nugent, who writes regularly for *New Art Examiner* and has participated in open invitational GALA art shows, was initially challenged by the tremendous responsibility of “being sensitive to the artists' concerns and then to the audience.”

After implementing standard procedures of public outreach to local lesbian and gay artists through advertising, contacts with area arts and community organizations, Nugent sifted through the slides of approximately forty artists who responded. After several visits to artists' studios, Nugent selected five artists who had a strong enough body of work to make a powerful artistic impression.

Offering a much broader understanding of our community through the expression of lesbian and gay art, Nugent hopes to be breaking down many of the barriers and stereotypes that continue to foster rampant homophobia.

“Personally, my involvement with the exhibition at Moore has been a very positive and happy experience,” she said, “and it seems clear to me now that no matter how difficult our uphill battle with Helms and his kind becomes, we will continue to fight back strongly, brightly and more affirmatively as a whole community.”

Obituary

Richard S. Taraborelli

Richard S. Taraborelli, 40, formerly of Philadelphia died in Los Angeles on May 4. He was hospitalized for six weeks prior to his death.

Taraborelli grew up in Overbrook. He moved to Center City in 1970, attended school for an associate degree in nursing, and worked nights at a bank. He spent much of his time enjoying the parks in Center City, dancing, entertaining friends with Italian meals, and growing whatever spices survived in coffee-can planters on his fire escape. He was employed for several years at Jefferson Hospital prior to his move west.

In Los Angeles, he worked as a practical nurse before securing a position as an orthopedic technician at Cedar Sinai in Hollywood. He

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