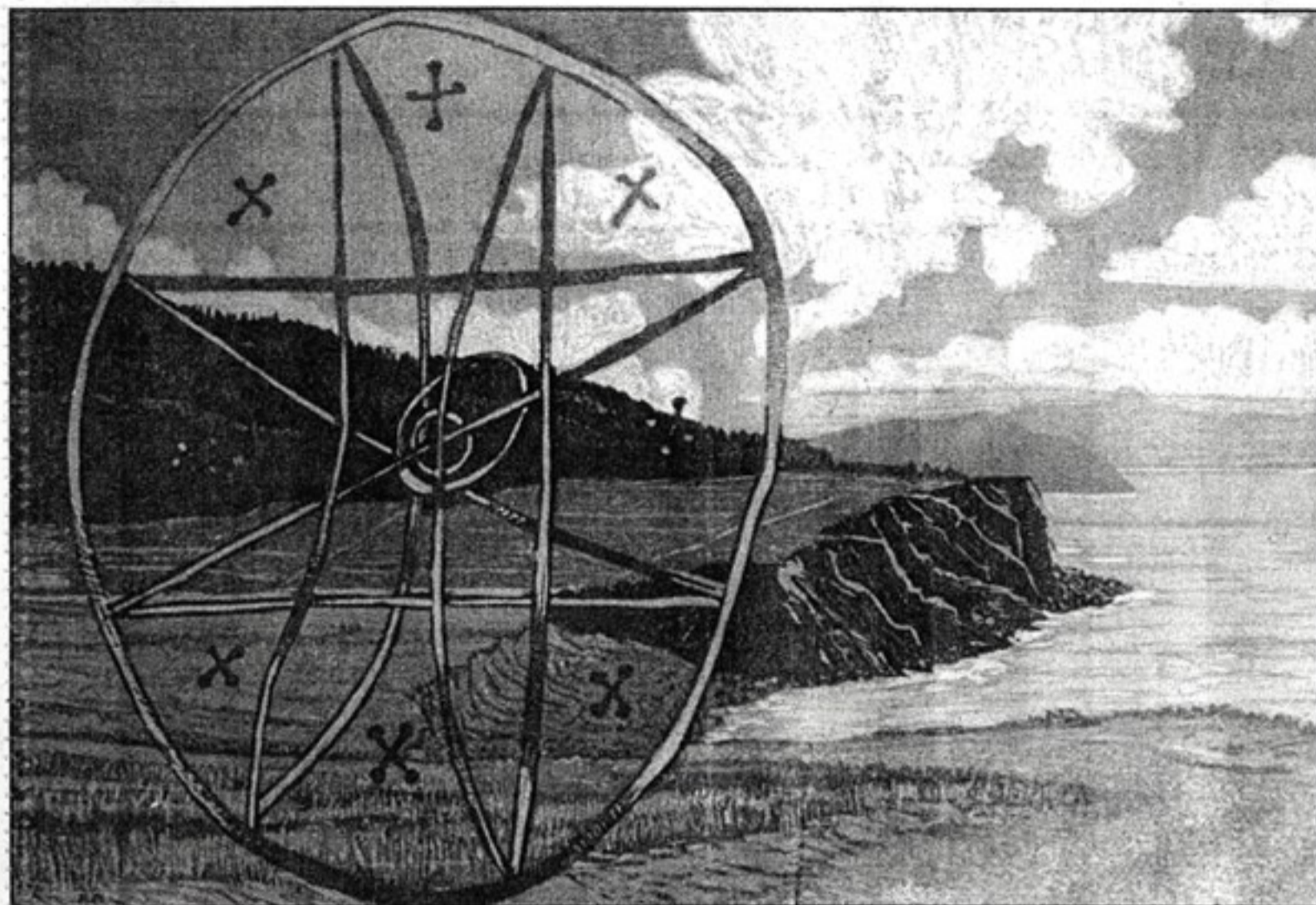


Much collectiveness, little independence in printmakers' portfolio exhibition



By Judy Birke

WOODBIDGE — "Collective Independence," on view through April 21 at the Jewish Community Center of Greater New Haven, is a 10th-anniversary celebration for the Printmakers' Network of Southern New England. With this, the group's third portfolio of prints its members aim to highlight the group's "collective personality and the continuing dialogue between unity and independence."

Indeed, while these artists appear quite unified in their competence as printmakers, there's little in this presentation of 21 prints that is truly independent. In general, the aesthetic is pretty slight and conservative, both in process and narrative, lacking the fresh visual allure and technical originality that distinguish much contemporary printmaking. Somehow the energizing

LEFT: "Mabou," a relief woodcut by Jim Lee.



Photos courtesy of Printmakers' Network

Kim Tester's reduction screen print, "Crossing Point-Guide Me Through."

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It's Only Natural Restaurant Pastels by Candace Vorio; through April 5; 11:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays, 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Sundays; free; 386 Main St.; Middletown; (860) 346-9210.
Jewish Community Center of Greater New Haven "Collective Independence"; a portfolio of original prints commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Printmakers' Network of Southern New England; through April 21; 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Fridays and Sundays, artists' talk 2:30-4 p.m. March 23; free; 360 Amity Road (Route 63); Woodbridge; (203) 387-2522.

dynamic that often acts as a catalyst for collaborative efforts appears not to have kicked in here.

Of course, part of the problem can be chalked up to the predictable difficulty of capturing the goal and spirit of an artist in an exhibition that includes only one piece by each participant. In addition, these works have certain limitations as parts of a portfolio of a given size and format — a fact that may account for the limited range of ideas and effects.

Nevertheless, some works stand out.

In her collograph, "Inside/Outside — Exit," Grace Bentley-Scheck finds beauty in unexpected places.

In what appears to be an abandoned back corridor, an unpicturesque view becomes an engaging scene. The subtlety of tone and variety of texture reflect a moodiness that turns the mundane subject into an evocative drama of associations and possibilities.

Carol Strause FitzSimonds' aquatint, "My Place at the Table," is a thoughtful treatment of everyday fare.

This is a well-drafted, well-composed sepia image of a section of a room with an empty chair at a table. Elegantly punctuated by shadows and croppings, it possesses a stirring, meditative quality that hints at touching domestic narratives.

Kim Tester's reduction screen print, "Crossing Point-Guide Me Through," a striking burst of vibrant color and dynamic rhythm, bristles with a crackling energy and spontaneity. The artist is clearly at ease with the possibilities of her medium.

ART REVIEW

Show: "Collective Independence"
Place: Jewish Community Center of Greater New Haven, 360 Amity Road, Woodbridge
When: Through April 21, Mon.-Thurs. 9 a.m.-9 p.m., Fri. and Sun. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Admission: Free
Info: (203) 387-2522

Other interesting pieces include Shirley Bernstein's woodcut/etching, "Mist Rising," a loosely composed, pensive landscape of varied textural effects, and Melody Knight Leary's relief/intaglio, "Nesting," a tightly constructed, well-realized, direct, semi-abstract image.

Speaking of form and content, have you seen those gigantic green things that have begun to pop up along the Orange Street corridor in New Haven?

I'm told that these bizarre forms, reminiscent of ominous alien creatures, are the latest in traffic-light fixtures in the city.

Well, you can call them what you want, but there's no way you can convince me that on some dark and foggy night, these things are not going to make an attempt to deliver me to another planet.

Just to play it safe, I'm driving down Whitney Avenue from now on.

Judy Birke of New Haven is a freelance writer and art consultant.