



March 26, 2006

JERSEY FOOTLIGHTS

By MICHELLE FALKENSTEIN

An Order to Make Art And a Show Is Born

The poets Diane di Prima and Maria Mazziotti Gillan were giving a series of readings in California in 2003 when Ms. di Prima told Ms. Gillan to go out and buy some art supplies. Once that was done, she told her they should go to their separate hotel rooms and make art.

"The only person who can boss me around is Diane di Prima," said Ms. Gillan, executive director of the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College in Paterson.

So Ms. Gillan, who said she had not painted since she was "a kid," went to her room and painted the roses outside her window. "I couldn't make a perfect rose," Ms. Gillan said, "but I made my own kind of rose." She began wondering how many writers made visual art, too, and decided to find out by talking to her writer friends and placing advertisements in literary journals.

The answer -- quite a few -- led to a show called "Crossing Boundaries: Visual Art by Writers," on view from April 1 to May 31 at two sites: the Hamilton Club Building at the college and the Paterson Museum. The exhibition features work by more than 50 writer-artists, including Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg, as well as New Jersey's own Laura Boss, Linda and Mark Hillringhouse, Pina Pipino and Doris Umbers.

Also on display will be three paintings by E. E. Cummings, whose paintings have not been publicly displayed in the United States since 1972, according to the show's organizers.

"I love it when I get a little idea and it becomes a big idea," Ms. Gillan said.

Around half the writer-artists in the show will read from their work at the opening at both sites on April 1. Information: www.pccc.edu/Art/Gallery/Changing-Exhibits/Crossing--Boundaries.htm or (973) 684-6555.

The Artist As a Tree Hugger

Kimberly Marrero, a private art adviser and museum educator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, said she has been thinking for years about an exhibition on trees. So in 2004, when she was asked by the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey in Summit to curate a show, Ms. Marrero talked trees. "They loved the idea," she said.

"Among the Trees," a group exhibition on view at the Visual Arts Center from April 7 to June 4, presents 28 works that consider the tree in a variety of ways, including a mechanical sculpture of a pileated woodpecker from 2005 by James Middlebrook that pecks at the wall, effectively turning the gallery into a tree.

Ms. Marrero said she is interested in trees in artworks only as a representation of something else -- "solace, the life force, shelter, as a global barometer, as a witness to war.

"It's important to me that the artist really needed that tree," she said.

Amy Wilson, an artist who lives and works in Jersey City, has two small watercolors in the show -- "Grief" and "Isolation," both from 2004. In the latter, seven leafless trees loom over a group of girls.

"I like the forest as a place of mystery," Ms. Wilson said. "It can be menacing or innocent. I like the anxiety that forests create, and the obsessive quality that painting trees gives me."

Other featured artists include Catherine Chalmers, Doug and Mike Starn and Yuken Teruya.

Information: www.artscenternj.org or (908) 273-9121.

Portraits of Children At Work, Not Play

Linda Hitchman, assistant curator of education at Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts, feels profoundly moved when she looks at "Let Children Be Children: Lewis Wickes Hine's Crusade Against Child Labor," an exhibition of 54 photographs.

"The little girl digging potatoes, she breaks my heart every time," Ms. Hitchman said. "A little boy picking cotton looks all of about 4 years old." In other photos, children sell newspapers, sew at home or work on oyster boats.

Ms. Hitchman has planned an activity to convey a sense of these children's lives to the children of today. Young visitors will create silhouettes of themselves, decorating them in ways that express their own personalities and interests. They will then use the silhouettes to compare themselves with the children in the photos.

"The working children didn't have identities," Ms. Hitchman said. "They were just robbed of their childhoods."

The photographs that Hine took of children, immigrants and the working class at the beginning of the 20th century helped change American labor laws. The exhibition, which was organized by the George Eastman House in Rochester, is on view at the Stedman Gallery through May 6.

Information: www.rcca.camden.rutgers.edu or (856) 225-6350. MICHELLE FALKENSTEIN

Photo