

A Gallery Season Closing Down in Kent

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

AFTER next weekend, the railroad station and caboose, the two parts of Jacques Kaplan's Paris-New York-Kent Gallery, will close for the winter. But the hard freeze hasn't settled in yet in Kent, and the season is going out with energy and high spirits.

The main action in the station is rambunctious sculpture by Peter Woytuk. The surprises he has contrived are sprung on viewers as soon as they enter the gallery. A life-size bronze cat with a light green patina seems to pad up to greet them. Some of its litter mates regard visitors curiously, the attitude with which visitors will regard them. Other cats scramble over huge rocks that Mr. Woytuk has brought in from his property. As a formal note, lichens on the rock are the same green as the felines' patinas. Mr. Woytuk's ability to startle is apparently new found: a few works left over from a previous show are highly stylized bronze animals, light years from this realism.

Still another of the cats looks in the direction of another installation by Mr. Woytuk, but is also well distant from it, for it features 41 mice. Though a rodent invasion isn't usually an occasion for humor, this one is because the artist overturns what is almost a sanctified convention, enshrining a sculpture on a pedestal. Several freshly painted white blocks have been provided but they have become mere furniture for the mice to scurry over. With shows of figurative sculpture it's often tempting to fantasize what happens when the lights go out. Mr. Woytuk's troupe comes to life in broad daylight.

He has smaller work lining the walls that features, for the most part, dark bronze crows. Crows are credited with being especially smart — it is said they hold trials of miscreants, for example — so their frequent presence in Mr. Woytuk's work is rather an honorific one; they are not pests. They crown icons of art history, for instance, when perched atop bronze poles that have spiral patterns like those of drill bits. These are Mr. Woytuk's versions of Brancusi's "Endless Column."

Crows will also conspire in puns: "Hope Springs Eternal" is simply a bird mounted on a spring. They also

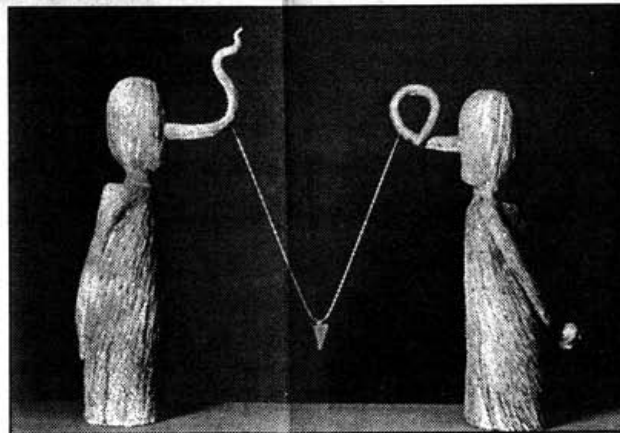


Peter Woytuk's cats have mouse companions.

take part in a circus. But a crow sitting on a pair of rusted shackles sounds a darker note as well.

Nancy Lasar also begins with a convention. Her line drawings are essentially academic still lifes composed of flowers and fruit — but others include a cow skull or a stuffed eagle. After providing the expected, Ms. Lasar begins her riff, intense Cy Twombly-like scribbling that takes its cue from the stolid elements though transforming them into clusters of emotion.

Down the street from Paris-New York-Kent is the Bachelier Cardonsky Gallery, whose owners, Vienne Bachelier and Darby Cardonsky, are also winding down for the season. Ceramic figure sculp-



tures by Melissa Stern are the commanding work. Some are nearly life size, and reminiscent of preclassical Greek sculpture. This is not only because Ms. Stern frequently leaves off limbs, mimicking the imperfect state in which ancient works are usually discovered, but because the figures are usually intensely rudimentary, cylinders topped by elongated spheres. They have no faces

but a definite nobility nonetheless. In their essentialness they are patterns for all humans.

Ms. Stern has another line of sculpture, a smaller one lighter in concept and intent. For instance "Birthday Girl II" is a white ceramic figure with a flouncy ballet skirt and a metal crown on her head. Ms. Stern has cut in a rudimentary scowl. But the smaller work can carry the



Clockwise, from above left: Some of Peter Woytuk's cats, "Homage to Grace O'Malley" by Suzanne Howes-Stevens and "Plumb Bob" by Melissa Stern.

theme of the potential for perfection characterizing the larger work. "Plumb Bob" is two figures with either flamboyant braids or elephant-like noses, with a plumb weight on a line between them as if they're determined to make things right. Ms. Stern also makes drawings that extend the theme, for she outlines or colors in the shapes in old dress patterns.

Suzanne Howes-Stevens combines oil paint and collage to achieve a very detailed Victorian look. Her major theme is women and a repeated character is a pun, "Whaling Woman." The sea is omnipresent in the work, giving force to the idea that the ocean is the mother of us all. Ms. Howes-Stevens also includes sizable amounts of hand-written text that is almost impossible to read, assuming viewers want to. A general bias

against literally reading art meant this viewer hardly tried. But one of the works stands out and makes me want to go to the library (or the Internet): Ms. Howes-Stevens celebrates Grace O'Malley, a 17th-century Irish pirate who kept a watch through her telescope, in order to be well prepared to plunder ships that had come into her sightline.

Collage is also the forte of Ingrid Freidenbergs, who works in the classic style of amalgamating little bits of detritus. An ordinary postage stamp in one of her works gives the approximate scale of her usual components. She favors square scraps of cloth in a variety of browns. Collage resembles playing classical music in that invention is not the point; it's how well the performer masters its intricacies. The same can be said of these works, with nonetheless inventive titles like "Brentanos" or "Villard's Note Pad." The artist's colors are in the range of the tones of Villard's signature wallpaper.

The shows in the Paris-New York-Kent and Bachelier Cardonsky Galleries in Kent remain on view through next Sunday.

DO NOT FORGET THE NEEDIEST!