

## ART REVIEW

# *ART REVIEW; The Human Figure, as Myth*

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By William Zimmer

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THE Hunterdon Museum of Art's "Degrees of Figuration" features five local artists and their work with the human figure. A common thread in the show is generalized and mythic images, which override the representation of particular people.

Bill Leech from Roosevelt is primarily a painter; his work has a deliberately hazy appearance, as if the many figures are out of his dreams, or out of our collective dreams. His major technique is to put friezes of cookie-cutter-like figures across the canvas. The procession is interrupted by quirky additions. In "Man Walking," for instance, the spectral figures contrast with strongly silhouetted but still anonymous ones, suggesting that simply existing these days is full of complication and quick changes.

The primary figures in "Military Painting" are soldiers, and thus suited to Mr. Leech's technique of lock step repetition. He abandons this format in four computer-generated prints. Croquet balls figure in one, and another, "Man Chasing Woman in a Green Landscape," is bucolic.

Paintings by Linda Stojak of Philadelphia are related to those of Mr. Leech in the way the figures seem to rise out of a dark background. There is often the sensation that only a part of the figures have emerged and that the rest are behind the dark paint.

Keary Rosen from Highland Park has contributed four standing figures grouped on the floor. Made of steel and painted baby blue, they are robotlike in appearance, and so related to the cipherlike figures of Mr. Leech's and Ms. Stojak's.

The other two artists in the show, Tom Nussbaum, a sculptor, and Charles Yuan, a painter, invest their figures with personalities.

Mr. Nussbaum, from Montclair, has perfected the technique of carving acrylic resin as if he were whittling wood. He creates primitive-looking figures that seem related to cigar-store Indians. "Crow Woman" and "Listening" are two examples.

Mr. Yuan, from Brooklyn, N.Y., uses bright colors, outlining his figures in black. They have a vaguely Eastern look.

The museum is also presenting two other shows -- sculptures by Frank Sabatino Jr., of Bethlehem, Pa., and Karl Stirner, from Easton, Pa. Mr. Sabatino's pieces might be latter-day shamans, with frameworks of distressed wood adorned with everyday objects like golf tees and feathers.

Mr. Stirner works in iron. His pieces look fresh from the forge. Also on display are his small paper pieces, which hang on the wall. They would usually be classed as collage but he calls them "low-relief sculptures."

"Fleisch," another piece by Mr. Stirner, may literally be the weightiest example of the human figure in the museum. A sleek mass of metal, the work conjures up a torso in the abstract idiom of Constantin Brancusi.

"Degrees of Figuration," "Frank Sabatino Jr.: A Primitive Impulse" and "Karl Stirner: Iron and Paper" remain at the Hunterdon Museum of Art, 7 Lower Center Street, Clinton, (908) 735-8415, through Jan. 6.