

ARTS

Sculpture and painting fused

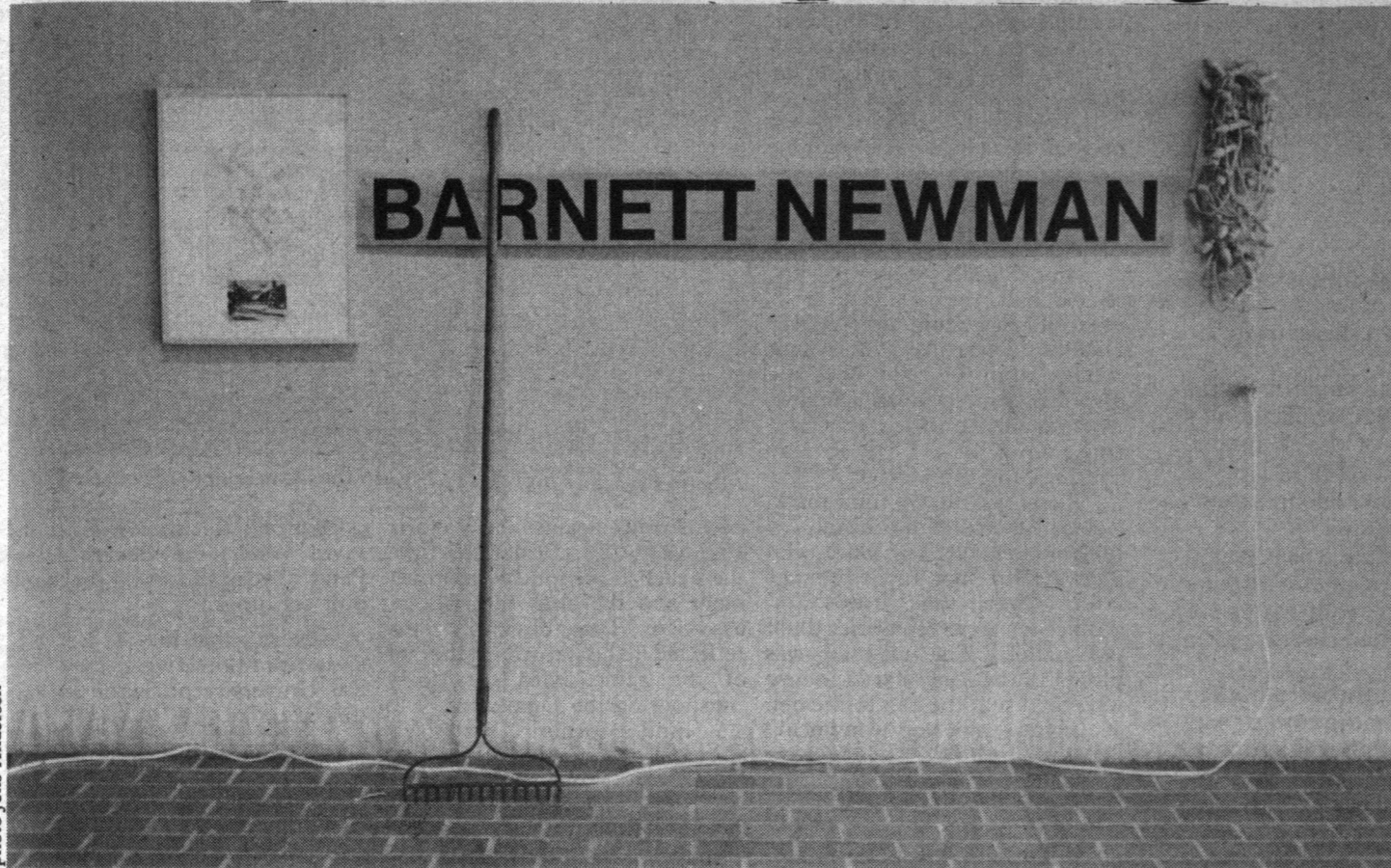


photo: Jens Andersen

The above hodge-podge is "Working Class Pictures - Barnett Newman." The ArtsEditor thinks he has never seen so much baloney in all his life. Other people, however, are capable of perceiving the true genius of the work. They pity the Art Editor's lack of aesthetic sensibility.

Ron Moppett (Paintings)
SUB Art Gallery
until October 12, 1981

review by Donna McAlear

The paintings of Calgary artist Ron Moppett can be seen alongside sculptures by Phyllis Green whose show was reviewed in the October 6 edition of *Gateway*. The pairing of these particular artists results in a stimulating exhibition as Green and Moppett have much in common, if only on the surface. Moppett, like Green, boldly merges painting and sculpture concerns and with less reserve, uses a multitude of

found objects in his painting-constructions of abstract and figurative symbolic images. A quick scan over the exhibitions leaves an impression of lightness and humor due to the bright color and playful assemblage nature of the work. However, upon further consideration it is evident that both artists are extremely conscious of their playfulness, restrain the spontaneous, leaving nothing to chance. This leads one to contemplate the work in a different manner, changing the mood to one of reflection.

When initially encountering the work of Ron Moppett one is struck immediately by all the "visual stuff" he offers his

audience. Words and images are boldly executed in strident color. Collage elements such as polaroids of the artist, book covers, playing cards and masking tape (*Dutch: 5*) are incorporated into the paintings and shovels, table clothes, light bulbs and other found objects are placed beside many of the canvases, completing Moppett's painting construction. Moppett eludes stylistic categorization by making obvious use of numerous painting and sculptural modes derived from Dada, Pop, Abstract Expressionism and Concept Art. His imagery and words are symbolic in nature. Many can be interpreted universally such as the light bulb image referring to ideas or inspiration in the painting *Studio Light 3* and in *Working Class Pictures: Picasso* where Moppett includes a framed poster of a Synthetic Cubist collage in the piece, a direct reference to the great 20th Century master. Still other images carry a more personal meaning for the artist and are less easily understood by the viewer such as the

reoccurring image of the portable green camp stove, drawn in a very simple, almost primitive fashion.

Despite all the "visual stuff", Moppett's paintings do not give the impression of spontaneous execution as does a Rauschenberg "combine", rather they have a sense of deliberation that immediately dispels previous thoughts of lightness and humor in the work. They are extremely self-conscious and provoke numerous questions. It is not enough to accept Moppett's work at face value or attempt to conveniently slot him into an appropriate stylistic category for easier understanding. No formalist is he! It seems that with Moppett's art one can choose to enjoy the "visual stuff" and leave it at that, or enjoy the "visual stuff" and remain a while longer to ponder, and ponder, and ponder.

Moppett's autobiographical work deals with the process of art making as a theme. Referring to contemporary and historical art styles and to the highly romanticized creative geniuses Van Gogh, Picasso and others, Moppett addresses questions about the chosen language of the artist, the artist's subject matter and his participation in the stream of art history. At times the result is a cool analytical statement as in the *Working Class Pictures* series of 1980 where the allusive juxtaposition of collage, painted canvases and found objects fail to convey much emotion or tension. By contrast, Moppett achieves a more painterly and expressive mode in *Studio Light 3* and *Fire 1*, restricting himself to oil paint on canvas. *Fire 1* shows a figure in a landscape that is partially obscured by fire. The flatly painted figure dynamically cuts a strong diagonal through the central paint activity while an airplane, stylized a la Malevich circles overhead. The painting wants to burst with a violent tension.

Studio Light 3 and *Fire 1* continue the struggle of the artist to deal with larger art concerns as in the *Working Class Pictures* but a stronger personal symbolism is developing in these paintings that says more about Moppett the artist. In these paintings the struggle to absorb and synthesize styles and ideas of past art and mesh them with his own personal understanding of art and life is very accomplished and Moppett seems to be emerging from behind the personas of the past, his art achieving an intensely personal expression and his concerns with the conceptual and expressive coming into direct contact.

Healing by shell-cracking

Talley's Folly
Rice Theatre, (Citadel)
until Oct. 18

review by I. and J. Levental

On one level the circumstances are absolutely ordinary — a man spends a summer evening talking with his sweetheart. On another, there is nothing "ordinary" at all. The man happens to be a 42-year-old Jewish accountant from St. Louis and the woman a 31-year-old spinster from a fundamentalist, wealthy, industrialist Missouri family.

The year is 1944. During a period in history of such international import, the personal problems of Matt Friedman and Sally Talley are, perhaps, mundane and rather trivial.

Yet *Talley's Folly*, currently playing at the Citadel's Rice Theatre, makes their relationship, and the brief summer encounter they share, something very special indeed. Playwright Lanford Wilson masterfully guides us through the complex maze of Matt's and Sally's worlds. In the course of 97 minutes he slowly, and ever so subtly, unfolds the essential parts of two very different lives. Throughout the drawn-out exposition Wilson drops clues which culminate in a neat and wholly satisfying resolution. No single detail is wasted.

Talley's Folly has a lot to teach. The essence of its lesson can be discovered in Matt's reference to the "egg syndrome". He makes the point that people are like eggs because they're no good unless you crack their shells and shake them up a bit. Both Matt and Sally had been victims of this syndrome. They had carefully hidden their inner selves behind a brittle, shell-like exterior. And although *Talley's Folly* does not claim to have any earth-shattering message, it is still a play which speaks to

each and every one of us. It shows how little people have to lose and how much they stand to gain by "cracking their shells" and communicating not from the brain but from the heart.

Talley's Folly is filled with humanity and a warm sense of humor that makes it most enjoyable to watch. The jokes don't stand alone but blend in with other naturally funny remarks, making them an integral part of the script.

Paul Soles, who portrays Matt Friedman, maintains tremendous control of his character throughout the play. His accent, manners and movements are at once typical of the European-Jewish American immigrant, but still brought forth with a special touch of individuality. Soles' character carries the play. This is partly due to the structure, which puts Matt in the spotlight, but also due to the very weak performance of Mary Pirie who encountered a great many problems in establishing a character for Sally Talley. Her southern accent does a disappearing trick from time to time, her movements seem jerky and self-conscious, and her delivery is strained.

Allan Stichbury produced another excellent set; unfortunately it was under-utilized. The lighting and sound effects which seemed so promising in Soles' 5-minute preamble to the play never made an appearance. The soft-glowing moonlight, the gurgling sound of the river, the baying of hounds, and the faint echoes of the dance band (the absence of which we would never have noticed had not Soles mentioned them at the beginning) were either deemed superfluous or just simply forgotten.

Despite these minor drawbacks, it was a very pleasant experience to see this excellently written play. *Talley's Folly* sets a good standard for the rest of the season to live up to.

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