

## More Drawing Clinic than Art

Written by Michael LoGuidice

Tuesday, 18 September 2001 18:00

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Give an artist tremendous talent in draftsmanship, shading, and painting but omit the passion, purpose, and message, and you have Joyce Treiman. A critic for the Los Angeles Times once described her as “an artist’s artist,” and that’s how I feel about the show of Treiman’s work at the Augustana College Centennial Hall Art Gallery. Artists who are interested in learning something about how to do shading, line drawing, and modeling on paper will enjoy it most. The rest of us will be bystanders.

This exhibit was organized for national tour by New York’s Schmidt Bingham Gallery, and the exhibition’s presentation at Augustana College is supported by Betty L. Bee. Treiman is a respected artist whose works have often been shown in retrospectives of 20th Century women in the arts. She was born in Evanston, Illinois, and received her B.F.A. in 1943 from the University of Iowa, where she studied with Philip Guston. She had her first solo show in Chicago the previous year. Treiman was employed as a commercial artist in Chicago during World War II but resigned after exhibitions of her work were held at the Art Institute of Chicago and in New York. In 1990, she was elected a member of the National Academy of Design. She died in 1991.

A serious art student will gain much from reviewing and studying this exhibition, because Treiman achieved a mastery over her medium. The show includes 23 etchings, lithographs, or monotype prints, and 35 pencil, pastel, colored-pencil, or charcoal drawings. Treiman had a prescient confidence when she said, “I don’t know what will happen to my paintings. I think they will be always appreciated, but I know my drawings will last.”

The two drawings I think are her best works in this show are *Rosie II* and *Rosie III*, pieces that have some emotion and finish. I couldn’t find any background notes or other information about the subject of these portraits, but it appears that there was some emotional connection with the artist. The compositions are simple portraits, but Treiman’s handling and display of the character of the subject using line and shading elevate the drawings to art. If I can look at a drawing or a portrait of a person and feel like I know the person, I consider it a successful work of art.

The only other works in the show in which Treiman put some emotion are the self-portraits and other compositions that include the artist. For example, in the study titled *The Plumed Helmet*, Treiman places herself in a prominent position and renders herself quite realistically and emotionally, while the other figures are somewhat wooden. The exception to this in the composition is the small dog at her feet.

Many of the other works in the show look more like (or are) studies for paintings, so there are some partially finished works, experiments, and other compositions in which Treiman is more interested in trying out techniques than producing a finished work. It is the inclusion of these experimental works that will be most beneficial to the two-dimensional artist who wants to see ways shading and crosshatching can be used to render realistic objects. A regular viewer to this show would just think that many of the compositions are unfinished.

It is appropriate for this show to be at an institution of higher education with a good art department, because if you want to see how drawings are put together, this show will be a good

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one to study. If you are interested in artwork that moves you with its message, though, you might want to wait and visit some other show.

*The exhibit will be on display through October 6.*