Written by Michael LoGuidice
Tuesday, 08 July 2003 18:00

As changeable and far-ranging as Teresa Mesich's paintings are in the current show at MidCoast Gallery West (in the District of Rock Island), David Zahn stakes out two bold, solid, consistent themes: bronze busts and hand-thrown ceramics adorned by figures. These two artists, in the same show, are like the flight of the bumblebee meeting the iron of Thor. This is Mars and Venus in the visual arts.

Mesich and Zahn are both established artists in the Quad Cities scene. Both have had works shown in the Rock Island Fine Arts Exhibition as well as shows with other local artists. Zahn exhibited in October 2001 with Bruce Walters at the MidCoast Fine Arts Gallery in LeClaire, while Mesich had work in *Breaking the Surface* (a show earlier this year at MidCoast Gallery West) and a recent two-person show at Quad City Arts.

Eclectic is a word that comes to mind when thinking about Mesich's work. From dogs to parks to allegory to the events of September 11, 2001, there seems to be no limit on the subject matter that inspires Mesich's work. She states this clearly in her artist's statement. "Most often I paint the figure, but with this exhibition I explore other topics. I have used the real as a basis, and have spun off into imaginative interpretations of animals, gardens, and buildings. Biblical stories and the lives of the saints have also been the building blocks for some of these paintings. Color still figures predominantly in all of my work, and is a constant source of personal inspiration. I know that my art is evolving. I do not expect it to look the same as it did years before, and I expect it will look much different in years to come."

My favorite painting by Mesich is *Chihuly's Garden*, showing a young woman walking down a path. It captures the whimsy and emotion I felt when viewing Chihuly's work at the Garfield Park Conservatory in Chicago last year. The painting is a small work, about 15 inches wide by 24 inches high, and it is almost lost among the larger works in this show. The painting is all curves and elongates reality while distorting the balance of the viewer by taking a bird's-eye view. That surprising twist on reality causes the viewer to experience something similar to finding that the beautiful flower you'd been admiring from afar, upon closer observation, was actually a Chihuly glass-blown sculpture.

Mesich has one work in this show inspired by the terrorist attacks of September 11, *Escape from New York*
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Breaking the Surface
show in March, she also had a work inspired by the events of that day,
Blue Sky Day II 9-11-01
. The
Blue Sky Day
is on paper, whereas
Escape from New York
is a mixed-media piece. In
Escape From New York
the twin towers are fabricated out of metal and are viewed as if from the ground.
Blue Sky Day
takes a perspective from above looking down. In

Blue Sky
, Mesich is taking a detached view, concentrating on the ethereal, but in
Escape
, we're down to the gritty reality, the buildings made out of metal, bringing home the violence of that act, and the people escaping from a disaster. The comparison of these two works lends credence to the artist's statement that her work is evolving.

Zahn likes his art to do the talking for him. I say this because his artist statement is unchanged from the one he penned in October 2001. I respect a visual artist who is more about doing his art than writing about what his art is doing. Furthermore, perhaps the artist statement still says exactly what Zahn wants to express about his art: "Figure sculpture is an art form, which when done well, is about much more than the person depicted. Communication of the state of mind and the physical body should be present. In addition to this, aesthetics are also an important element. If I create a sculpture which conveys the look of a person and nothing else, I know as an artwork, the piece has failed. In some of my recent works, I have been combining the human body with geometric forms and other design elements. I try to create sculptures that are aesthetically pleasing, emotionally thought-provoking, and interesting to look at."

Artifice could not be a better exposition of the masculine impulse that explodes from Zahn's work. This is a phallic pillar of bronze with a scowling face on the head positioned near a painting by Mesich titled *Shower of Roses – The Little Flower*. We can only imagine what this scowling god of bronze would have to say to the little flower.

Zahn's work is impressively done; the finish is impeccable. In *Artifice*, he combines the figurative with the geometric in a Celtic weave of metal and man. In
Impulse
, strips of metal become the flowing flesh of a woman's face. The juxtaposition of metal and human in Zahn's work makes it bold; the craftsmanship with which he finishes his work makes it art.

The ceramics in the show provide a cooling yin force tempering the hot yang force flowing from the molten cast-bronze sculptures. Once again, his finish on the works is impeccable. The pottery portion is trimmed and glazed uniformly, the clay selection is well-thought-out, the figures are attached without obvious seams, and the compositions work well. His ceramics are priced from $85 to $275 and are a bargain at that price.

The bronze from out of the blast furnace meets the palate of a woman in this two-person show. I can't think of a better exposition of the Venus in painting viewed alongside the Mars of the blast furnace and kiln.

An opening reception for this exhibit will be held on Friday, July 11, from 7 to 9 p.m. at MidCoast Gallery West, 1629 Second Avenue in Rock Island.

Also on Friday, Quad City Arts will be hosting an opening for an exhibit featuring Corrine Smith and Steve Sinner.