

ART REVIEW

The Medium Is the Message (And Vice Versa)

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

SOUTH ORANGE

THE gamble behind a new exhibition at the Pierro Gallery of South Orange has paid off. It is a success for the artists and for curator, Mary Birmingham, who wanted to create an exhibition that reflected current issues in American society. She chose headlines as a theme, finding artists who worked with material gathered from the mass media to make art. The result is an intensely topical show.

Ms. Birmingham, an independent curator, has selected artwork that refers to current events, politics and world affairs. Some of the work directly engages these issues, making social, cultural and political statements. But other work looks at what Ms. Birmingham calls in a catalog essay for the exhibition "the mediation of news," or the way in which the news media package and filter information for consumption.

Topping the first category are works from Carlo Vialu's "We Will Be Greeted With Flowers" series, which takes its inspiration from words spoken by the former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz before the current war in Iraq. Mr. Vialu makes and assembles pieces of flower jigsaw puzzles into the shape of machine guns and other symbols of warfare.

Amy Wilson's cute cartoonlike paintings exemplify the second category. Ms. Wilson, who lives in Jersey City, incorporates text from both left- and right-leaning news sources into childlike narrative compositions that remind us of the way that seemingly innocent news information can be deeply partisan and ideological. Her own

sampling of headlines and political slogans mirrors the way news media outlets cherry-pick news.

Then there is artwork here that uses news as a raw material, whether bales of newsprint or television news footage. I've seen a lot of this kind of artwork in recent years, but I was not aware until seeing this show of just how many artists were engaged in this kind of thing. Perhaps as many as a third of the 17 artists here work directly with newsprint or appropriate images from newspapers to make art.



Pierro Gallery

Among this group of participants is A. J. Bocchino, who collected headlines from The New York Times for a year. He then color-coded them according to subject (red for wars, yellow for political issues) and stuck them together to create a vast luminous pattern of information in which the year's often deadly events slowly unfold. The piece has a playful flair, but there is also a disturbing glibness to it.

Peter Jacobs also uses The New York Times as a source material for his diarylike collages. So does Lynn Sullivan, whose three-dimensional sculptures are recreations of Iraqi citizens portrayed in Times photographs. But the prize for the most creative use of newsprint belongs to Curt Ikens, who made a pair of blocky easy chairs from copies of The Star-Ledger.

Other artists paint broadcast-television images and pages of Internet sites (Laura Greengold, Joy Garnett, Cheryl Yun), or distort television video footage. Mike Estabrook presents a nine-minute video loop of "The O'Reilly Factor" played backward with odd suggestions and fake news items scrolling across the bottom of the screen.

Is the artist searching for subliminal messages in headlines? I don't know, but it is questions like this that make the works in this exhibition so compelling.

"Headlines," Pierro Gallery of South Orange, 5 Mead Street, South Orange, through July 16. (973) 378.7754 or www.pierrogallery.org.

At the Pierro Gallery of South Orange, Cheryl Yun's "Flyaway Babydoll With Suicide Hipsters 1," left, and, at top, Joy Garnett's "Evac (Strange Weather Series)."

