

The PUTNAM COUNTY NEWS and RECORDER

Cultural Events December 5, 2007

New Paintings by Win Zibeon and Norm Magnusson at Van Brunt Gallery

Win Zibeon and Norm Magnusson are two artists who combine provocative ideas with a high level of technical skill to produce engaging art leavened with incisive humor. They are both wisenheimers. Each artist will make you think, but don't worry, you'll have fun in the process. There is no lecturing going on, nothing holier than thou. It's more like meeting a really funny, smart person at a party. You'll enjoy the conversation, even if later you may be scratching your head... "What did he say?"

Zibeon is an award-winning painter who has several bodies of work, two of which are featured in the show at Van Brunt Gallery this month. His *Placcato Oro* paintings portray the world as it might have been seen by King Midas; everything is covered in gold. Small gems, these works explore Zibeon's overriding concern with illusion and reality. He clearly can paint whatever he wishes and he chooses to subvert the illusions he can so easily create with a second or third level of eyefooling imagery.

In one painting, a Japanese mask hangs from a nail hammered into the frame of a placid seascape, the mask, the nail, the seascape and even the frame, all deftly painted mirages. Even the title has a double meaning: Goldmind. And indeed this is an opportunity for the thoughtful viewer to mine several layers of meaning, not the least of which is a meditation on what is truly valuable in life.

Other paintings by Zibeon are from his Anti-Landscape series. In these works, the artist attempts to unhinge the viewer's attachment to safe and predictable visual reality. We can't really experience beauty if our vision is filtered by habitual response and with this in mind, Zibeon with characteristic humor, attacks his own landscapes with a badly aimed dart here, a well placed hanger and tie there. Again illusion and counter illusion are all skillfully handpainted. Clearly the artist owes a debt to the great Surrealist Magritte, who famously inscribed on a painting of a pipe "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," (this is not a pipe). However, Zibeon has made this rich vocabulary of illusion and allusion his own...saying in his own way that "Ceci n'est pas a view of the Hudson."

Norm Magnusson is more political than Zibeon, but fear not, he is not interested in preaching to you, he'd rather get you to chuckle knowingly. Magnusson will be presenting his new series of paintings *America's Seven Cardinal Virtues*. This is a follow-up to his earlier exhibition at Van Brunt Gallery: *America's Seven Deadly Sins*. It is a measure of Magnusson's independent thinking that he is willing to seriously address what is good about this country at a time when our flaws are all too clearly visible. Of course, his take on our virtues is anything but jingoistic puffery. As in the earlier group of paintings, there is nothing simplistic about Magnusson's point of view even though his work at first glance may appear to be borrowed from an oversized children's book. Certainly in this brutal period of our history there is no shortage of horrific imagery, in the media and in the work of outraged artists. But just as certainly much of the political art currently being made is simply illustrative of a particular political bias or agenda. Magnusson's work is free from these limitations and aims at a wider audience.

The basic fact is that Magnusson likes people. He simply wishes that we would do a better job of taking responsibility for our lives as part of a community of shared needs and values. He appeals to our better selves not with a barb but with a wink. It's as if he's saying "Hey, we can do better than this." And so his work has an essential element that's missing in a lot of current art: compassion. He's never talking down, he's conversing with equals. It doesn't hurt that he makes his work well. This is another measure of Magnusson's respect for his audience.

The exhibition of new work by Win Zibeon and Norm Magnusson runs from December 8 to January 7. The artists' reception, which is open to the public, is on Saturday, December 15 from 6-9pm. Van Brunt Gallery is located at 460 Main Street, Beacon. The gallery is open Thursdays through Mondays 11am - 6pm or by appointment. For further information call 845-838-2995 or e-mail: info@vanbruntgallery.com.