

Helen A. Harrison, "Artists Who Make Work Out of Play," The New York Times, January 7, 1996

"Creation/Recreation" Islip Art Museum, 50 Irish Lane, E. Islip. Through Feb. 4. 224-5402

Artists Who Make Work Out of Play

The creative activities of artists are often viewed by outsiders as more like play than work, closer to recreation than to labor. The 13 artists in this group exhibition, organized by museum's curator, Karen Shaw, undermine that notion by appropriating subjects, forms or techniques from recreational pursuits, literally making work out of play.

Sport is perhaps the quintessential amalgam of the two pursuits, as Peter Buchman points out in his miniature dioramas of baseball fields and the boxing ring. Using old luggage as portable containers for sports vignettes, Mr. Buchman comments on how memorable moments may be stored away and carried around by participants and spectators alike.

As an observer of people who hunt and fish, Joann Brennan neither glorifies nor condemns the subjects of her color photographs. Instead she focuses on their absorption in the culture of blood sport without portraying them as bloodthirsty. The aptly named artist Kenn Bass cleverly subverts the skill and knowledge required for fly-tying. In his wall installation, "My Wilderness," he uses unorthodox materials, including scraps of personal ads, rubber bands and other castoffs to make flies that only an urban fish would rise to.

Matt Blackwell takes a similar approach in his canoe made of old license plates, food cans and pieces of tin ceiling. This parody of a boat traditionally fashioned from natural materials hints at the consequences of environmental degradation. Greg O'Halloran is even more direct in his critique. Mimicking arcade games, his wall-mounted sculptures suggest that humans are toying dangerously with the natural balance.

Games feature prominently in several artists' imagery, serving as vehicles for larger messages. In over-size color photographs by Rimma Gerlovina and Valerity Gerlovin, the couple's faces become puzzles that symbolize the difficulties inherent in communication. The labyrinth inscribed on Mrs. Gerlovina's delicate features implies that however disarmingly frank she appears, her expression masks a mazelike complexity.

For Michael Henderson, game boards provide familiar structures for painting and drawings that deal with personal information and private thoughts. In "The Pleasure of the Text" an innocent line from "Oliver Twist" becomes the springboard for a homoerotic fantasy of galactic proportions.

The tic-tac-toe game is the starting point for Drew Shiflett's meditative drawings, in which fragments of interiors and landscapes float almost randomly. Helene Brandt plays with knotlike arrangements of fabric, shoelaces and rubber tubing, making forms that might almost be calligraphic characters but that also resemble dancers or acrobats.

Manual labor inspires Steven Brower to imagine work as a self-fulfilling, even obsessive, process which, like art, may be as impractical as it is inner-directed. His "Pine Valley Orchard Manner" satirizes the overbuilt suburban dream house, complete with every imaginable amenity except, unaccountably, a garage.

Jody Lomborg transforms a different kind of labor into art. By equating knitted patterns with shapes and textures of minimal painting, she blurs the distinction between fine art and craft.

Elaine Reichek adapts traditional sewing techniques to make political commentaries on the influence of European civilization on indigenous cultures. Her needlework samplers and Indian-style dresses appear charming and decorative, but they teach hard lessons about dominance and its costs.

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