



Brush Marks

By PEG CHURCHILL WRIGHT

Two artists who make exceptionally bold statements are exhibitors at the Schoharie County Arts Council's Visual Arts Gallery in Cobleskill Public Library through Friday, June 29. Presenting recent works in a joint show that fits together surprisingly well are Sal Cascio of Scotia, the dean of Capital District watercolorists, and Altamont sculptor Marjorie White Williams, whose large-scale "autobiographical" plywood and lucite works have been much in evidence in the area of late.

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Most of Cascio's 19 watercolors are not the traditional kind. His masterfully relaxed technique, suggesting more than it actually presents in terms of imagery, is seen in "New York August," a small, almost abstract painting making full use of white space. Most of his water-medium paintings, however, are large acrylics that substitute high-powered opaque color for the customary transparent layerings of watercolors. Cascio's background as a corporate artist — he is senior art director in the corporate marketing communications operation of General Electric Co. at Albany — is especially evident in these works of adroit simplification and spatial deployment.

"River's End," in which Cascio's compositional grace finds its perfect complement in the billowing canvas of sailboats, and "New England Scene," another rendering of land, sea and sky that employs the artist's favored brilliant blues, greens, lavender and orange, are among his most effective acrylics. While some might be discomfited by the unnatural colors and almost poster-like quality of these paintings, they are spectacular visual declarations that underscore Cascio's always skilful use of space.

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For those accustomed to his usually scenic subjects, the surprise in this exhibition are Cascio's paintings from summers on Cape Cod revealing a newfound indoor interest — including "Cape Studio," for Cascio a detailed rendering of the artist's lair, and "Back Porch," comfortably combining the structural and functional with the natural beauty of the landscape beyond. Still, if there is one painting in this collection that summarizes Cascio's watercolor capacity it is "Still Life With Orange Jar," a mixed medium painting of the clearest vision and most proficient paint-handling. This work would easily be overwhelmed by Cascio's more audacious paintings were it not for his shrewd use of contrasts and subtleties.

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Subtlety seems not to be in the vocabulary of Williams, who discovered sculpture in graduate school after 17 years as an art teacher and has been searching her own psyche ever since. In the past, her monumental works have used lucite in some interesting ways in combination with laminated plywood. Now she shows an increasingly refined technique with plywood, a new interest in other woods and painted elements, and a desire to explore the international conscience. The nuclear threat finds expression in "S.T.A.R.T.," two bulbous figures with paddle feet that move and hatches that open to reveal heads of both skeleton and missile connotations emblazoned with superpower symbols, and "Hawkmobile," another mobile plywood sculpture that unmistakably comments on the nuclear arms race.

Williams' sculpture is still most emphatically accessible when she is self-absorbed. The contemporary feminist search for meaning and fulfillment in life is expressed by "Self Portrait," a rounded, earth-mother figure that raises questions about woman's multi-faceted role in family and society. When the whirligig handle on top of the figure is turned, the face rotates to show the artist's friendly countenance in a range of emotions from benign to pained. A hinged door in the belly opens on a host of dowel-shaped smaller figures with enameled faces. The interior cavern is lighted, inviting intrusion and perhaps the handling and rearranging of the unattached little "people" inside. Williams' most eloquent recent work, in terms of emotion and craftsmanship, is untitled. The artist's own struggle can plainly be seen in this wood-cast acrylic piece that needs no name to convey the emergence of universal woman from her cacoon.