

## PERSPECTIVES

Exhibit on asphalt offers surface with a smile

By Christine Temin, Globe Staff, 11/6/2002

Asphalt. It's not the first subject or substance that comes to mind when thinking of art, even at a time when artists use straw, broken plates, bird skeletons, and a lot of other weird stuff that drives conservators nuts. At least asphalt is more durable than most materials.

But an art show based on it? Joseph Carroll explains. The curator of a new show at Elias Fine Art that is all about potholes and parking spaces, runways and ramps, Carroll talks about how he hit on the theme, revealing the workings of a curator's mind.

It started several years ago, when he encountered a collection of Walker Evans's Polaroids at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Included were images of highway lane markers, directional arrows, and other street subjects.

"They had incredible wit, and they also worked as abstractions," he says. "There's one that's a black field with three white dots down the middle. Sometimes the patterns were more interesting than the actual subjects."

His next asphalt encounter was a 1952 Charles and Ray Eames film, "Blacktop," that shows soap bubbles flowing over the surface of a children's playground. The score is Bach's "Goldberg Variations."

"It's baroque music and baroque bubbles," Carroll says. A video of the film will play in the gallery as part of the show; the other video included is Robert Smithson's "Rundown," which documents the artist dumping truckloads of asphalt on a hill outside Rome.

With the idea of the show gelling in his mind, Carroll started making notes at art fairs and galleries whenever he found an artist using the medium that was starting to turn into a curatorial obsession.

There's a darker side. Carroll has worked in environmental design and preservation, fields in which, he says, "asphalt has come to mean sprawl, unchecked development. So there was this dissonance about it. There were images I really liked, but also books about how bad it was."

The Doug Hall photo on the show's announcement card is pure romance of the American road, a seemingly endless stretch of highway with nary a car in sight.

Then there are the photos of car crashes that the German photographer Arnold Odermat started making in the 1950s, working for police and insurance agents.

Sounds gruesome. But, says Carroll, "there's no human presence. They're just nice, orderly little accidents. They're almost comical."

Ed Ruscha's deadpan book on "34 Parking Lots," all in Los Angeles, is in the show, as are works by photographer Oscar Palacio.

"Oscar's in asphalt denial," Carroll says. Palacio's new photos tell the story of people who didn't want their driveway anymore. So they laid sod directly over the asphalt. "There's this very hopeful sprinkler on top," Carroll notes, adding his own hope that his show will have a wide appeal. "We've all been stuck in traffic," he says.

"Asphalt" is at Elias Fine Art, 120 Braintree St., rear, Allston, through Dec. 21. Call 617-783-1888 for information.

#### More art in Allston

This weekend you can look at "Asphalt," then travel on some of the stuff to see a lot of other art in Allston. The 16th annual Allston Arts District open studios will feature 35 artists working in a variety of media and styles. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Addresses are 119, 129, and 120 Braintree St.; 20 Rugg Road; and 24 Penniman St. Call 617-787-3532, ext. 205.

#### German self-portraits

The McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College is hosting a groundbreaking show, "Reclaiming a Lost Generation: German Self-Portraits from the Feldberg Collection 1923-1933," on view through Dec. 8. Like most McMullen exhibitions, this one has meaty content - and programming to explore it. Tonight's event is especially significant. Cardinal Walter Kasper has come from the Vatican to give a free talk on "The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavor of the Catholic Church," at 8 p.m. in room 008 of BC's Devlin Hall. The president of the commission, Cardinal Kasper is here at the invitation of BC's Center for Christian-Jewish Learning. For information, call 617-552-6027 or visit [www.bc.edu/artmuseum](http://www.bc.edu/artmuseum).

#### Focus on David Smith

Another great show on view now is "Lois Orswell, David Smith and Modern Art" at Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum through Feb. 16. A lecture series on the exhibition winds up tomorrow with Karen Wilkin, author of "David Smith: Two Into Three Dimensions," speaking on "A Personal Retrospective: Lois Orswell's David Smiths" in the Arthur M. Sackler Lecture Hall at 485 Broadway in Cambridge. The talk is at 6 p.m. Admission is free.

#### Photos for the bidding

The Photographic Resource Center, at 602 Commonwealth Ave., holds its seventh benefit auction tomorrow. Some 170 works by 150 photographers will be up for bids. You can preview the works for free today and tomorrow from noon to 5 p.m. After 5 tomorrow, you'll have to pay \$25 to stay on for the auction; the price includes a copy of the handsome catalog. The silent auction starts at 6 p.m., with the live auction beginning at 7. The auctioneer is Stuart Whitehurst of Skinner, Inc. Absentee bids can be made by mail, e-mail, or phone. For more information, call 617-353-0700. Proceeds go toward PRC's exhibition and education programming.

Highlights of this year's auction include Olivia Parker's ethereal little "Clam" and Arno Rafael Minkkinen's "Self-Portrait, Kilberg, Vardo, Norway."

Newton fund-raiser

You can't do everything, especially if you're a small arts organization struggling to cope with drastically reduced state funding. The Massachusetts Cultural Council used to give the New Art Center in Newton more than \$15,000 a year. This year, which marks the Center's 25th anniversary, the figure is down to \$5,000.

An anonymous philanthropist has stepped in with a \$15,000 challenge grant, money that must be matched by the end of 2002. Even so, the Center has had to make tough choices. It's dropping its longstanding dance and drama courses to focus on its visual arts education and exhibition programs. "Our exhibitions are what we're known for," says Jean Mineo, the Center's director. "We want to build on that."

The Center's next exhibition, the ninth annual "Icons + Altars," is a budget-builder as well. It features work by more than 90 regional artists that's for sale through a ticket-drawing process: Each \$200 ticket guarantees the holder a work. This year's "Icons + Altars" opens Nov. 15. For information, call 617-964-3424 or visit [www.newartcenter.org](http://www.newartcenter.org).

Christine Temin's Perspectives column runs Wednesdays.

This story ran on page C1 of the Boston Globe on 11/6/2002.  
© Copyright 2002 Globe Newspaper Company.