

After the parade, there's still art

By Lynn Stanley

With the passing of another Labor Day, Provincetown begins its gradual shift from frenetic to a slower, more contemplative pace. While some galleries continue to present individual artists and shows every two weeks, many have returned to longer (and saner) exhibition schedules; shows last over a month and feature a variety of work.

artStrand's current exhibitions balance the strong, realized work of Tabitha Vevers, Breon Dunigan and Irene Lipton, a triumvirate of artists who've taken pleasingly divergent creative paths.

Vevers is known for her delicately rendered figurative work and enigmatic narratives; in her hands, oil paint takes on the sensual sheen associated with fine enameling or 15th-century egg temperas. In her current show she has appropriated seashells as the surface and frame in which to continue her dreamlike and sexually charged narratives. A number of pieces, however, show a shift toward (and mastery of) elegantly spare compositions; a broken egg shell, a minnow, a woman's upturned face seen from a scallop's view. The work feels rare and deeply connected, avoiding preciousness.

Breon Dunigan's new sculpture continues to pack an aesthetic wallop. For over a decade, Dunigan has explored the rich emotional terrain of the body, creating compelling work that can be at once haunting, disturbing and humorous.

Biomorphic shapes — a gourd, a Rubenesque stomach — sprout trunk-like nozzles or groping mouths, even diminish into frozen wisps of smoke. Ceramic and bronze are the media of choice and the patinaed or lightly glazed surfaces are equal to their content.

Rounding out the show are Irene Lipton's abstractions, works on paper that combine wax, graphite and oil paint. The surface of each is worked and reworked to create lovely areas of transparency and layered occlusions, and the shapes and palette convey a kind of personal geography with the sensual history of palimpsest.

The work of Dunigan, Lipton and Vevers can be seen through September 14.

Two large group exhibitions that deserve a careful look are "Collectors Collect" and an exhibition juried by Trevor Fairbrother, up through September at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum.

"Collectors Collect" features rare views of artwork from private collections on the Outer Cape. A particular gem is Charles Kaesela's "Wellfleet Oyster Boats," circa 1930; this oil painting's harbor scene — featuring a fat, inconographic tugboat — is achieved with a subdued palette, substantial brushwork and the graphic rendering of water and shadow, creating an image that feels stamped in time. Also on view is George Yater's "Coast Guard Patrol," circa 1935. Yater pushes this simple figure in a land/seascape toward abstraction with the use of flat and curvilinear planes of color. The resulting faceless figure crossing the frame feels haunted and haunting

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— a lonely soldier on a solitary mission. Both appear courtesy of James Bennette and David Cowan.

Curator and scholar Trevor Fairbrother has created an exhibition that showcases disparate work through surprising visual couplings and a refreshing use of wall space. Highlights include Michael Walden's lush "View of the Harbor," in which the artist's exploration of space and color balance the literal elements of architecture/harbor/rendered space within a flattened grid of reds, blues and greens. This vibrant patchwork floats on the surface of the picture plane, both fragmenting and unifying the com-

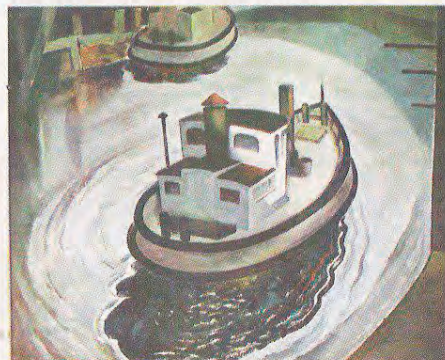
position.

Joerg Dressler's "First Changing Leaves" combines the buttery application of paint with a palette knife, the sensitive suggestion of the elements of landscape, and a well-honed appreciation for the drama of an expansive sky. At the Tristan Gallery, a series of Dressler's land/seascape paintings is also on view through September. Dressler's exploitation of a full range of greens and blues creates compositions that feel vital and oxygenated. Other work at Tristan includes architectural studies of Stephen Coyle. These new compositions have an integrity akin to the work of Edward Hopper, but lean more toward a sense of immutability rather than existential angst.

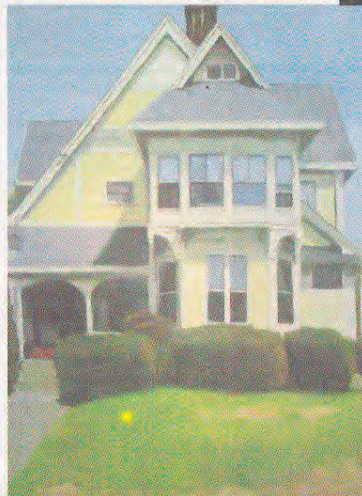
At the Berta Walker Gallery there's still a few more days to catch another important series of shows. The painter/ceramicist Polly Burnell is known for work that contains a highly developed personal iconography; her paintings tend to be small, intimate compositions and include quirky narratives (the literal representation of the natural world and ani-

mals) along with vibrant decorative elements. Her current show, "Provincetown is my Muse," revisits her love of place coupled with a sense of loss; graveyards, floating eyes and horses are familiar themes.

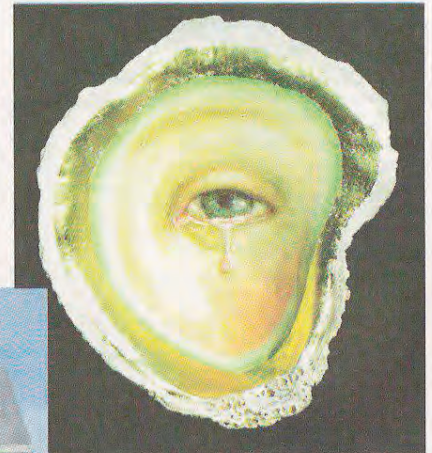
Also on view are intricate and gravity-defying ceramic sculptures by Tom McCanna, and the



THE FLEET SAILS: "Wellfleet Oyster Boats" by Charles Kaesela, at PAAM.



PUTTING ITS BEST FAÇADE FORWARD: Stephen Coyle's painting will be showing at Tristan Gallery.



PEARLY TEARS: Tabitha Vevers' "Pearlmakers II" from her new shell series.

enigmatic, faux-historical paintings and assemblages of Nicholas Kahn and Richard Selesnick; the creative duo continues their exploration of imagined histories and corresponding objects, crafting texts so layered they feel like scholarly tomes from a parallel universe.

But don't delay; up through September 11.

(Lynn Stanley is an artist and writer living in Provincetown. She is the education coordinator at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum.)