

GERALDINE KIEFER: PASTORAL LANDSCAPES

Pasture Lands, Woodlands, and Waterways of Bath County, Virginia

Alson Smith Library, Shenandoah University, September 20-October 31, 2005

Dancing Fire Gallery, 15 East Boscawen Street, Winchester, November 4-30, 2005

Overview

Pastoral Landscapes is the latest exhibition of drawings and mixed-media works by Shenandoah University assistant professor Geraldine Wojno Kiefer. The show will be on view on the second floor of Smith Library, adjacent to the Marsh Conference Room, from September 20 through October 31, 2005. *Nimrod Hall Reveries*, a selection from these drawings and mixed-media works, will then be on view at Dancing Fire Gallery in Winchester from November 4 to 30.

Generation and Evolution

Geraldine Kiefer's drawings are watercolor, gouache, pastel, Conte crayon and colored-pencil impressions of natural motifs. The drawings were created on site from the balcony of Nimrod Hall, a spacious late-18th-century farmhouse serving as a summer guest residence and as the home of the Nimrod Hall Summer Arts Program for Artists and Writers. Gerry received a Marion Park Lewis Foundation grant for two weeks at Nimrod, selecting one artist week in mid-June and one writer week in early August to complete this portfolio.

Gerry's drawings document feelings about and responses and reactions to the Nimrod Hall landscape, a peaceful pastureland surrounded by working farms near the Cowpasture River and the George Washington National Forest, Gerry has visualized this rolling and wooded site as a meld of spatial layers, densely overlaid with linear arabesques and calligraphy and tinted in richly varied hues of green. Named for nearby Warm Springs Mountain and the Jefferson Baths in Warm Springs, the drawings are about life, movement, spirit, healing waters and subterranean sources. They are also about modern art and spirituality. "The drawings bring the viewer into an intimate and meditative relationship with nature, by means of linear flourishes, fountains, webs and networks," she says. "German modernist artist Paul Klee's aphorisms, 'Take a line for a walk,' and 'Art does not reproduce the visible, but makes visible,' have strongly influenced me."

Gerry's mixed-media works are more complex than the drawings in construction, yet they are all thematically and visually interrelated. Digital photographs by her husband, art photographer Bruce Kiefer, with whom she worked during her June week at Nimrod, are the starting point for her meditations. These meditations, in turn, enrich the original scenes, bringing their latent qualities and multi-dimensionality to fruition. Gerry arranges the photographs as titled units in titled series. Transmuting meditation and arrangement into art making, she selects colored pencils that complement and heighten the palettes of the photographs. She may request that Bruce make one or more prints of a particularly striking set of images. Then, she begins to draw.

For example, Gerry requested that Bruce print six "Reflections," a group of landscapes he had

taken during their June Nimrod week. While at Nimrod, Bruce had altered and manipulated these landscapes to make them bilaterally symmetrical and magical. He printed them for her in two formats (8" x 12" and 12" x 12") and in two color saturation keys (medium and light). Entitling the images the Nimrod Hall Scrapbook Series, Gerry packed them up for her August week at Nimrod. Selecting one image and its two prints per day (August 8 through 13), she drew and wrote directly onto the photographs. The line-enriched eight-by-twelve prints functioned as studies for the line- and writing-enriched twelve-by-twelve prints. As drawn line metamorphosed into stream-of-consciousness phrase, each "Reflection" took on the qualities of a dream—evanescent and floating, yet rooted in material reality.

Initiating the Nimrod Hall Barn and Stream Series, Bruce's photographs of barn and garden details suggested a welter of natural and "man-made" readings—topographic maps, ice floes and rivers, along with platforms, siding and tools. Previsualizing these and mounting the photos on museum board, Gerry worked up each one in colored pencils. She collaged natural objects on top of pivotal "points," the intersections of key sightlines and/or objects of the compositions. So as to bring out additional details, colors and textural harmonies, she bordered the images in handmade, decorative papers. She housed them in deep frames to convey the associative richness of the subtly altered scenes.

Along with the previously mentioned series, Gerry Kiefer's mixed-media work includes the Nimrod Hall Tree Abstractions Series, the Nimrod Hall Woodland and Herb Garden Series and the Nimrod Hall Fantasy Series. A Nimrod Hall Family Cemetery Series and a new series of mountain drawings are projected for summer 2006.

The Pastoral Theme

The regional setting for *Pastoral Landscapes*, Bath County, Virginia, continues the Kiefers' ongoing project: a suite of works interpreting the beauty and history of the Valley of Virginia. The term "pastoral" locates the landscapes in three contexts. These are personal, retreat and recuperation; aesthetic, the pastoral landscape tradition of Virginia, interpreted by artists such as William Louis Sonntag, Lefevre Cranstone and Rockwell Kent; and cultural, the notion of the pastoral as an escape from urban pressures, a meditation on sacred places and a vehicle for evocative and descriptive writing.

Bruce and Geraldine Kiefer will exhibit jointly at the Shenandoah Arts Council Gallery from November 4 to December 1. Concurrently, Gerry will show selected works from the Shenandoah University show at Dancing Fire Gallery. Gerry's future projects include a full-length article on the wilderness-to-pastoral theme as found and interpreted in art and writings on the Shenandoah Valley from ca. 1840 to 1920, with a focus on the Civil War and immediate postwar years.

For more information about these exhibitions, please contact Geraldine Kiefer at 540-545-7323, 540-247-7093, or gkief@su.edu. You may also visit her website at <http://www.su.edu/staff/alycan/websitetests/gkief/kieferhome.htm>.

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On the Pastoral Landscape

Rasmussen, William M. S. and Robert S. Tilton. *Old Virginia: The Pursuit of a Pastoral Ideal*. Charlottesville, Virginia: Howell Press, 2003.

Sears, John F. *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*. Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.

Sweet, Timothy. *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Wilton, Andrew and Tim Barringer. *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.