

Collectors catch 'in today, out tomorrow' art on the run

ART GALLERIES

By Alan G. Artner

Art critic

In the last few years, the accelerated pace of the art world has propelled collectors into any number of places where they wouldn't ordinarily go. These are the places where everything new is supposed to be happening. At present, it is the East Village in New York.

Always the notion is romantic: a setting destined to be as stimulating as Turn-of-the-Century Paris. So everyone goes hoping to witness (or buy) a part of history. The only odd thing is the tacit understanding that next year, or the year after, the *really* advanced art will be created somewhere else.

Speed is therefore of the essence; wherever the place, one has to be there early if the experience is to count. And this is where Chicago collectors may find themselves at a disadvantage. Their purchases will not carry the same weight if New York collectors have decided the bloom is off.

The Peter Miller Gallery, 356 W. Huron St., is, then, performing a considerable service by showing five East Village artists. They are age 24 to 38 and none has had a museum retrospective or is represented by a tonier gallery uptown. On the literal and figurative levels, where they are "coming from" is still "where it's at."

The emotional tone of the work is fairly consistent, being either cynical or alarmed. This is not exactly a surprise, for the success of Neo-Expressionist painting encourages a steady display of

irony and *angst*. The difference, however, seems one of conviction: When most of these artists unleash their barrage, it looks authentic, not simply manufactured to satisfy the imperatives of a popular style.

For example, the ambiguities of Stephen Lack's oil-stick drawings grow naturally from his themes of kidnapping, accident and domestic strife. When he works on a larger, more "public" scale, his treatment also is more direct, having the accessibility of news photos that one has seen a thousand times.

Similarly, the collaged and overpainted works by David Wojnarowicz alter forms of communication to redress the balance of power that hitherto had favored the communicators. Painting is less important than an intensity of social engagement, which is transmitted by extending the purpose of original posters or maps.

Ted Rosenthal's metal sculpture moves in the other direction, being concerned with man as the master of his destiny. They are every bit as violent as the pieces shown last summer, but here several of the figures clearly are engaged in self-destruction, which makes for the most persuasive warning of the lot.

Compared with the others, Mark Kostabi is the tamest painter, shooting at easy targets with a formal arsenal that occasionally resembles that of Russ Warren. Likewise, Rick Prol's figuration shows—to a Chicagoan, at least—an uneasy marriage between the mayhem of early Paul LaMantia and the stringy elongations of Austé Peciura. *Caveat emptor.* [Through Saturday.]