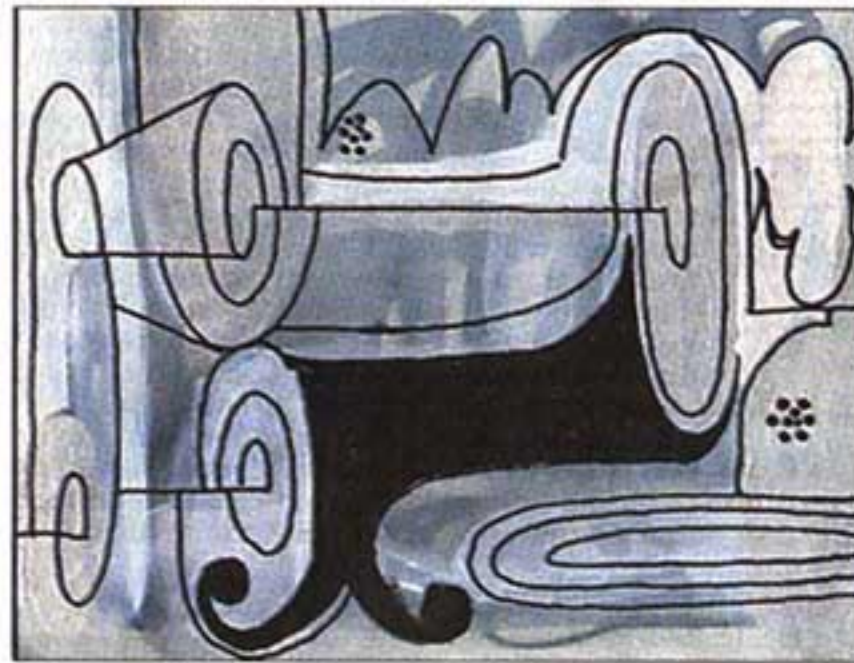


ART

Transformation or Death at Branchville Gallery



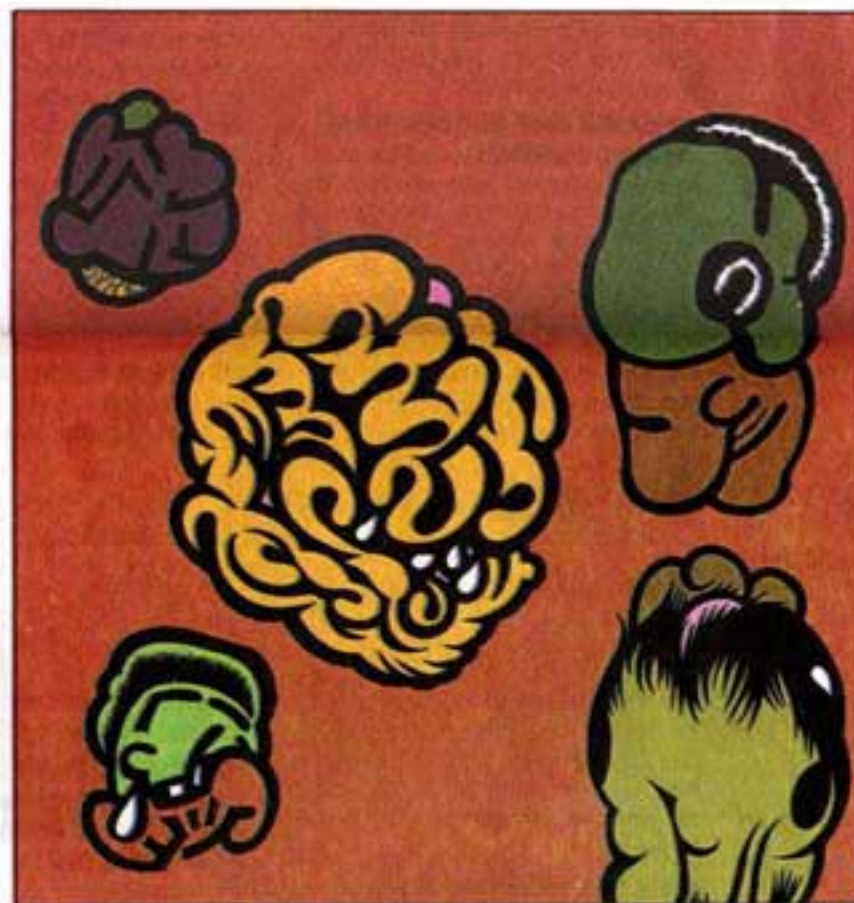
"Blue Boy" by D. Dominick Lombardi.



"Abstract Noir 3" by Kenneth J. Marchione.



"Shrunken Head 8" by D. Dominick Lombardi.



"Heads 900" by D. Dominick Lombardi.



"Ophelia" by Kenneth J. Marchione.

BY L.P. STREITFELD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Is there still a place for the hot button of human passion in the digital age? Perhaps the most pertinent art right now is that which consciously addresses unwieldy emotion as a dynamic new form of Pop.

At Branchville Gallery this month, D. Dominick Lombardi and Kenneth J. Marchione establish a timely and essential dialogue regarding the very

REVIEW

form by which slick Pop surrealism explodes with the messiness of human emotion to create a new dynamism of beauty incorporating the shadow of the grotesque. This sophisticated exchange goes a long way in explaining the great attraction of the Japanese post-apocalyptic graphic style mindlessly reflected in the work of recent art school graduates in America.

For his "Abstract Noir Series" of acrylic and gouche collages and paintings, Marchione uses Ophelia, the doomed archetypal female in Shakespeare's "Hamlet" as a launching point for an exploration of evolving interior space. The conceptual series begins with mazelike renderings on a shower curtain, displayed in the window of the gallery. A cut-out rendering of an arm

and leg surrounding the cross-shaped assemblage provides a generic message: Ophelia, whose love was thwarted by the preening arrogant ("Get thee to a nunnery") Hamlet, exists in every one of us. When Eros is sadistically denied in this patriarchal universe, what joy can we expect from life?

Lombardi gives us a clear and devastating vision of where we are headed. His longtime series of post-apocalyptic heads continues to transform. In the Branchville Gallery's inaugural exhibition, "Blast," he displayed genetically mutated figures that still retained human characteristics and all-too-human emotions. On view here are several of his slick India ink "Heads," distorted beyond recognition while delivering the visceral punch of the self-devoured; and the gorgeously executed "Shrunken Heads" color paintings on Plexiglas, rendering tint as mutated stains respecting no boundaries other than their own. The most recent "Post Apocalyptic Tattoo Series" of limited edition silkscreen prints begins an internal dialogue between several of these ferocious characters inside one narrative frame, thereby illuminating

his work's inherent cinematic quality. In the completed arc of this highly evolved and self-contained narrative series on the human head, the surface has been stripped away until the viewer is viscerally confronted with a ravaged brain bent on cannibalizing itself for expression. Devolution of consciousness brought on by human apathy?

We stare uncomprehending, as if witness to Ophelia's internal disintegration while numbly singing prophecies of her own demise. If we take her as the traditional form of female beauty, as passive and ethereal, both artists here push their technique to a new ideal of beauty that is dynamic, visceral and playfully free of preconceptions. The result becomes like a visual jazz, where beauty and grotesque are locked in inseparable rhythm, one unable to be defined without the other.

It may be said here that if we don't recognize and accept that which we find most hideous in ourselves, then we may become the very thing — the Lombardi mutant — which we deny. So, where does this invigorating dialogue regarding societal repression and denial of human emotion

deliver us? For a start, a recognition that the human finger poised on the hot button of the nuclear age is more likely than not being guided by passion. So, here we arrive at the body conscious conclusion of this cycle of entrapment: transformation or death.

The exhibition of recent works of Kenneth J. Marchione and D. Dominick Lombardi will be on view through Feb. 13, when the artists will give a gallery closing talk at 3:30 p.m. Gallery hours are Friday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 2-5 p.m.; and by appointment. Branchville Gallery is at 14 W. Branchville Road behind the Branchville train station. Call 544-8332.