

THE ARTS

Mystery pervades show

Easton gallery exhibition one of contrasts

By JANIE WELKER
Express arts writer

EASTON — After a whirlwind grand opening in January, the Gallery at the State Theatre Center for the Arts is literally back with *The Next Show*, an exhibit of work by seven Philadelphia area artists.

Phillipsburg painter Gary Smith, who curated the show, says that in reviewing work to include, "I began to see a persona of Philadelphia art."

That persona, reflected in this show, is largely abstract but quite varied, producing an interesting counterpoint of painting, sculpture and multimedia work.

Smith found that many of the artists have links to the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts, which stresses strong classical training. "I think it's showing up in the strength of the abstraction," he says.

That's certainly true in the case of artist Iwan Nazarewycz, who has contributed some of the most intriguing work in the show. At first glance, his paintings appear to be merely well-crafted compositions of black-and-white geometric shapes, but a closer look reveals work of depth and beauty.

In most of his work, floating, spinning orbs play against the constrictions of a rigid square. The geometric shapes are black, deep blue or blood red, against black and white grounds.

Nazarewycz creates a richly textured surface by building up layers of paint, allowing red to bleed through freely painted black or white grounds. The orbs themselves are surrounded by narrow halos of vibrating color — red and turquoise around one, yellow and red around another.

These paintings fairly hum with energy created by the tensions set up by the artist: the formal play of depth and shallow space, the rich, painterly surfaces against the austere compositions.

Smith says Nazarewycz's work reminds him of Albert Pinkham Ryder's mysterious

nightscapes, a fitting association.

Painter Marc Salz also concentrates on formal issues of color, space and form in his brightly colored, shaped canvases. The paintings contain expressive passages, but seem lacking in intensity.

Works by painter Neysa Grassi, on the other hand, seem in line with the mysterious depth of Nazarewycz's work. Grassi works large, in deep earthy tones of green, gold and black. In two of her paintings, "Veiled Heart" and "Devoted to the Hidden," heart-shaped forms seem to pulsate in the depths. Passages of red underpainting hint of blood close to the surface. Her third work, "Curious Shape as a Focal Point," features another organic form that hints of body parts — possibly a torso, or a cell, or body orifice. Again, there is the evocation of blood and flesh.

Other painters in the show include Robert Keyser, whose series of four paintings hang in the lobby, and Dawwin Nix.

Keyser's paintings, titled "Syrinx Variations," are inspired by a piece of music for flute by Debussy, which in turn derives from the myth of the Greek god Pan. Syrinx was a nymph pursued by randy Pan; the gods, taking pity on her, turned her into a reed. Pan in turn used the reed to create his legendary Pan pipe.

Smith says the Debussy piece is haunting and eerie, and Keyser's paintings contain references to the Pan legend, as well as to the fugue-like music it inspired.

Nix's painting, improbably titled "Julie Andrews," features a large field of amber, interrupted on one side with a deep red line in the shape of an upside-down thermometer. It's hard to know whether the actress makes his temperature rise, or whether there is any real connection between the title and the piece. "He just titled them about what he happens to be thinking at the moment," Smith says.

Although his work hangs on the wall, Bill Walton's con-

structions are closer to sculpture than painting.

Using darkened wood, metal and glass, in addition to canvas, Walton creates a series of non-objective pieces which seem designed to summon the feeling of the place that inspired them. In "Green Cabin," a plate of rusty metal is suspended above a canvas painted in shades of green and gray. "Dark Hill," is composed of a small block of wood, topped with a strip of metal and dark glass.

The shows two sculptors, Rebecca Johnson and Charles Fahleen, serve as foils for each other.

Fahleen's work is stark and rather Spartan. In "Dirty Devil," plates of polished aluminum are molded into a semi-circular shape, like a cup in cross-section. "Kayenta" consists of cylinders of steel and brass, stacked with discs of heart wood, to form a tilted tower.

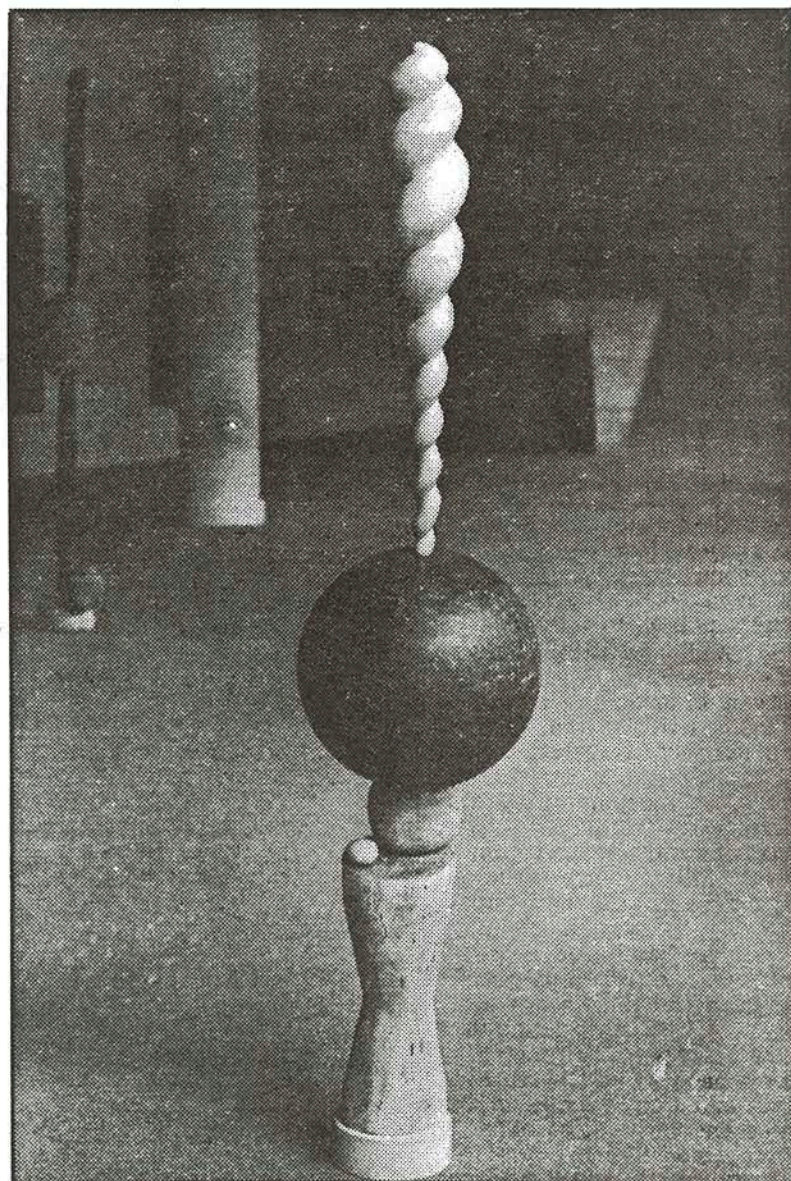
By contrast, Johnson's work brims with whimsy.

The artist works with recognizable forms, cobbling them together to form loose associations of ideas and fanciful compositions. "Sea Glass" is like a totem composed of familiar images. Johnson imbeds a bit of glass into a wooden shape, carved to look like a cork float. Spouting from either end of the wood are slender metal tubes, rusted and textured like barnacles.

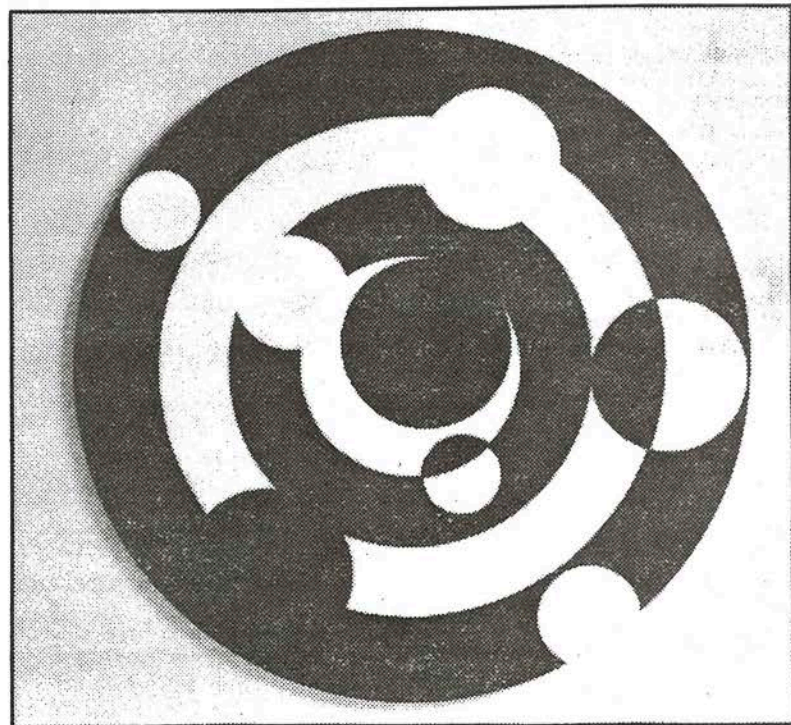
"Old World" contains a darkly mottled globe sitting on a rounded stone, which tops a block of wood resembling a worn piling. Spiraling from the top of the globe is stylized cloud of carved wood, which soars off at an angle. Or is it the rising smoke of destruction, or an instrument sent down from above to impale the earth?

For all its humor, there is a mysterious undertone to this piece, evoking as it does, earth, sea and air.

■ *The Next Show* runs through March 31 at The Gallery at the State Theatre Center for the Arts at 453 Northampton St., Easton. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, plus one hour before and one-half hour after performances at the State Theatre.



"Old World," a sculpture by Rebecca Johnson.



An untitled oil by Iwan Nazarewycz.