

'Winter into Spring' a fine debut for Elan

It's a pleasure to be able to report that 8 Elm St. in Rockland has exorcised its ghosts and sparkles in the sweet light of spring. The excessiveness of that metaphor notwithstanding, I am happy to see the place put to good use. After a 2½-year hiatus, Maine's most elaborate commercial gallery space is occupied by a new enterprise, Elan Fine Arts.

Elan's inaugural show is called "Winter Into Spring," and it gets the gallery off to a good start.

As the name implies, the event is about landscape paintings. The work in it is substan-



Philip Isaacson

tial and, taken as a whole, is as good a representation of contemporary pictorial landscape work as you're apt to find. Most of the names in it are new to me. While no boundaries are probed, the diversity of attitudes is refreshing. The range is from near-photorealist to gestural and the physical circumstances are benign. The informers are more Welliver and Lois Dodd than, say Henri or Bellows, and the land, though snow-covered, is more pastoral or wooded than rough coastal.

Perhaps this is what winter does to artists. They draw upon their inner resources to find reassurance in the land around them. And, if it can't be found in the land, then it may exist in the sky.

As you can see, this is a rich, appealing exhibition. And it's a big one. There is work from 11 artists and, I think, significant efforts by each of them.

Reviewing an exhibition of this size



ART REVIEW

"Winter into Spring"

Where: Elan Fine Arts, 8 Elm St., Rockland

Hours: 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
Thursday-Sunday

When: Closes May 18

Call: 596-9933

and variety is like reviewing a world stamp album. (I'm not putting stamps down. There are some very good ones, particularly the 2-cent Andrew Jacksons of 1861.) There is no exact focus other than the title, the expectancy of snow and winter light. Features in the snow are an exercise in discrimination and winter light is a perennial surprise. I carry forward a sense of hard, crisp light, but the artists here remind me of chromatic modifications that range from softly reassuring to pyrotechnic.

Monica Kelly's work is the most familiar to me. She is an accomplished painter with a quick, annota-

tive style. The word gestural applies to her paintings. You can trace the motion of her arm in the tracks of the paint. Her landscapes are about as close as this show comes to the abstract and they are generally elegiac. They are somber reflections about the land and the season. In them the coast is a brooding place, dark and withdrawn. There is an abiding intensity in Kelly's work.

Perhaps I should not call Louise Bourne's painting gestural. The term implies a sweep of the arm and while that is not quite so here, there is a boldness in the work and an exultation of process that tempts me. Bourne is a strong painter and she has taken a careful look at the hills and farms of Maine.

Alan Fishman is bolder still. He paints the moment rather than the fact. There are no careful notations about roads or water; rather, there are generalized statements about winter's occasions. You've been there and you can smell them in Fishman's work. He has, through invention and chance taking, expressed the animation and freedom I find in winter. I

should also mention his verve as a colorist. It's impressive.

Keeping to boldness for a moment longer, I point out the work of John Schmidtberger. It makes the closest pass to Welliver, but in the end is more aggressive and emphatic. His is a hardscrabble place of rough woodlands and hills. In introducing this article I used the term pictorial. It does not apply to this artist's work nor to that of Fishman.

Cindia Sanford paints the intimate winter landscape, the tailored grounds near a home or in a park. Snow imparts another set of forms to the dense clipped plantings, and they become other beings, perhaps monuments in a cemetery. This sense of mortality is heightened by a funereal light – a light of sweet promise. I take these paintings to be considerations on mortality. This thought does not apply to all of Sanford's work. One painting of trees and a building against a coloring sky has the quiet melancholy of a late winter day.

Drama in the sky is the principal subject in Lydia Cassatt's pastels. She presents the wooded coast in dark moments relieved by passages of silver. She also presents skies that elect to become neon.

Joanne Wilson's tight, minutely considered landscapes have the hard clarity that I have mentioned. The light transmits even the smallest detail, and Wilson refines and presents them objectively. Vaino Kola's pastels of snow, trees and ice formations are investigations into patterns. They are aloof from their surroundings and very formidable.

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