

Galleries and Museums

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Art Review By Victoria Donohoe

Salesmanship in old Shanghai

Haverford College's exhibit of advertising posters from early 20th-century Shanghai gives a fascinating picture of what happened when Chinese culture met Western commercialism.

The exhibit, "Selling Happiness in China," also tells us why such posters must be viewed as a movement rather than simply as a collection of 23 posters.

Many of the posters (including the winsome damsel definitely not in distress on a pleasure boat, with her Eveready-powered flashlight handy) share stylistic traits with general poster-making and fine-art trends of the period. And yet, unquestionably, their imagery, content and social functions are distinctive.

Such posters very often feature a beautiful and glamorous woman in new circumstances of prosperity and good fortune. A fair number of them manage subtly to draw on the cultural and history of the Chinese people while advertising products from Standard Oil, Colgate Palmolive, Eveready batteries and British-American Tobacco, all with offices in Shanghai at the time.

The work shows Chinese artists for the first time producing art that is commercial both in content and distribution, art that reflects a certain assimilation of Western values and ideas. That window of opportunity lasted only to 1938, when war intervened. But Chinese people already had begun buying these posters to hang in their homes. That's how these rarities survived. It's an informative show.

Haverford College's Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford. To Feb. 24. Mon.-Fri. 11-5, Sat.-Sun. noon-5. Free. 610-896-1297.

Abington Art Center. Clearly the pacesetter among suburban neighborhood art centers sponsoring solo exhibits by regional talent, Abington hosts four such shows concurrently this month. Among them, Rosalyn Richards of Lewisburg is closest to possessing star



An Eveready batteries poster is part of Haverford College's "Selling Happiness in China: Advertising Posters from the Early 20th Century."

quality. In her graphics and oils, Richards is very savvy about presenting microscopic views of growth processes in nature. Her drawings and etchings are awesome.

Louise Barbeau Chodoff is a Mount Airy sculptor and video maker whose light-inflected slide-show *Grove* tells of 16 paper trees she made and showed at the Fringe Festival. These she recently "planted," with volunteer help, at Carpenter's Woods on the Wissahickon as a commemoration, awaiting oak seedlings.

Danielle Bursk of Langhorne is a mark-maker who digs the action of piling up brush marks on paper or Mylar that turn into something meaningful. Yawn.

Nyugen Smith of Jersey City at deadline was setting up two "bundle houses" with found objects. Such work questions the meaning and value of sculpture by substituting shelters people build for themselves in primitive conditions. Is sculpture really so empty?

Abington Art Center, 515 Meetinghouse Rd., Jenkintown. To March 1. Tue.-Fri. 10-5, Thu.



Louise Barbeau Chodoff and a helper "plant" paper trees along the Wissahickon.

10-7, Sat. 10-3. Free. 215-887-4882.

West Chester University. Philadelphia Sculptors (founded 1997), our region's only organized sculpture pros, are showcasing 29 members at West Chester. Cheryl Harper's mixed-media *Diluvium*, a watery Katrina narrative, is its most striking work.

There is a menacing tension in the metalwork by Elizabeth McCue and Paul Hamanaka, while Milan Kralik Jr.'s metal displays more of an upbeat lilt.

Concerned with form and woody material in balance, Ken Vavrek's sophisticated piece suggests tree trunks withered to mere twig-limbs or stumps.

Interest in surface qualities marks Paul Wandless' mask and Carol Cole's paper pulp offering. J. Sullivan Turner's obliquely expressive bicycle made from found objects salutes Manayunk's bike race. A promising suburban debut.

West Chester's Mitchell Hall, West Chester. To Feb. 22. Mon.-Fri. 9-4, Sat. noon-4. Free. 610-436-2755.

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