

Reviving Painting as a Viable Medium

By D. DOMINICK LOMBARDI

PAINTING, a mainstay of traditional art making, has fallen out of favor many times, especially over the last 30 years or so. Representational painting has had the toughest time, in part because it is not considered progressive enough to keep up with the latest innovations in technology as evidenced by the popularity of video, film or sound installations, machines and robotics, performance art and computer-generated or enhanced images.

In a recent interview with Deborah Rothschild, director of the Williams College Museum of Art, the video-mixed media artist Tony Oursler said, "For the technological capabilities of our time, painting is outdated as a means of communication and presenting information." This simple pronouncement prompted the curator of the Krasdale Gallery, Sigmund Balka, to mount an exhibition, "Making the Walls Sing," at the Krasdale Gallery in the Bronx and here in White Plains.

"Making the Walls Sing" set out to prove that the subtle, albeit static properties of traditional media like oil, acrylic and tempera paint, when placed in the right hands, could still compete with alternative methods.

David FeBland's oil on canvas "New York Midgets" (1998) goes a long way in making Mr. Balka's case. The painted menagerie of parallel worlds incorporates many subplots in much the same way that a multilayered story line does. One first sees two distinct levels of existence: the normal-size, frenzied city dwellers and the toy-soldier-size out-of-their-minds-with-fright mini-dwellers.

Later on, one might spy the after-life in the form of a medium-size, winged deliveryman. At the very top of the canvas, a mischievous skateboarder appears to ride the upper edge of the picture as an out-of-focus figure assaults the main figure, a distracted businessman, by grabbing him from behind. The whole thing adds up to a fertile dreamscape filled with fear and hostility rivaling most real life, big city experiences.

Just to the right of "New York Midgets" hangs what could be considered the polar opposite of Mr. FeBland's vision: Janet Sawyer's oil on linen, titled "Prince and Thompson Street" (1993). Ms. Sawyer's painting depicts an active downtown street corner brimming with life — a quiet, sensible place where local vendors arrange flowers as taxis calmly pass on the left.

"Making the Walls Sing" runs through Sept. 24. The number to call to schedule a visit is 694-6400, ext. 2125. ■