

At Danforth, watercolors on grandiose scale

Christine Temin Globe Staff

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*forth Museum of Art, Framing-
ham, through Jan. 22.*

By Christine Temin
Globe Staff

Watercolor has a precious, polite image that this exhibit was designed to contradict. The seven art-

ists in the show all work big — some of the paintings are six feet across — and the scale alone makes for free flowing paint and bold gestures that defy the notion that watercolor means washed out. Catherine Bertulli, for instance, makes jumpy, collage-like combinations of vividly colored shapes which resemble Matisse cutouts. It's the play of these shapes you notice at first, not the subjects suggested by titles like "The Green Piano" or "A Colorful Harpsichord."

None of the artists is a surprise choice: All are familiar to the Newbury street habitue. Taken together, their work shares both solid technique — watercolor is a demanding medium, unforgiving of mistakes — and solid values: None of the trendiness of the New Expressionism turns up here.

Richard Yarde, who lives in Amherst, is the most strikingly original painter of the lot. His romantic still-lives and interiors are filled

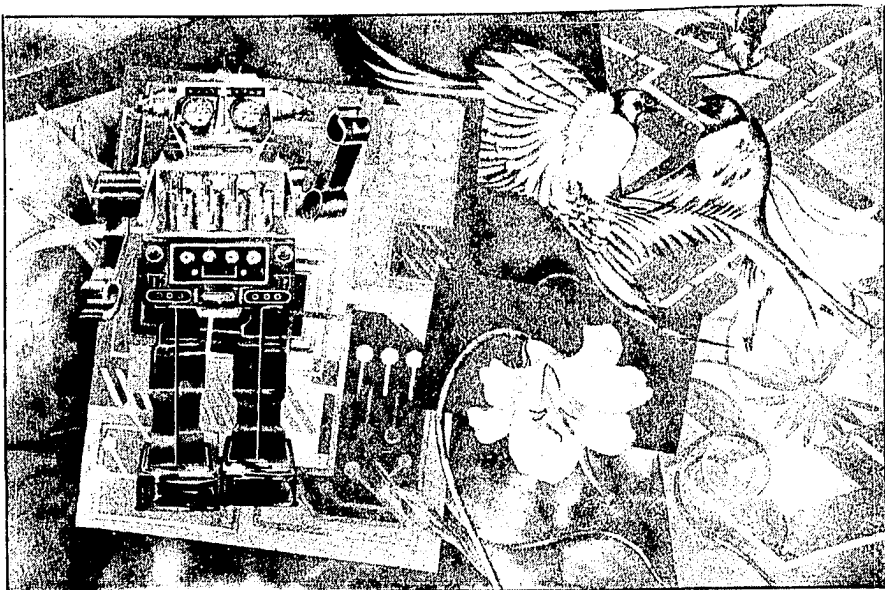
with subtle, nostalgic patterns, like wallpapers faded with age. Oddly shaped expanses of blank white suggest that parts of the brittle surfaces have been torn away. No single element ever dominates a work: the mellow surfaces have consistency, and mystery, too. In "The Mirror" Yarde offers a self-portrait almost buried in the background; a curving necktie and hulking coat have more vitality than Yarde allots his own figure.

Todd McKie's paintings, with hard-edged, floating Surrealist shapes and witty references to early-20th-century art, are perhaps the least likely candidates for watercolor as opposed to oils. The watercolor here acts as leavening, keeping the forms from becoming pompous.

Karen Canner Moss' works are even more highly detailed than McKie's. Moss juxtaposes the natural and the man-made worlds, plac-

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WATERCOLOR ON A GRAND SCALE — Works by seven watercolor artists who have been fellows or finalists of the Massachusetts Artists Foundation, at the Dan-



Karen Canner Moss' "Modern Nature" at the Danforth Museum.

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ing, for example, a shiny robot alongside birds and lilies. The flora and fauna are painted with the diligent observation of a 19th-century natural history text.

Watercolor is good for depicting water, it almost goes without saying. Natalie Alper's abstractions all look like ponds in the midst of a rainfall. The paper is drenched in thin veils of meandering paint, given definition by fingerprint strokes resembling foliage dipping into the water. Pencilled arcs suggest ripples on the

pond; The works have the peaceful intimacy of a Chopin etude. Susan Shatter gives her scenes of ocean and rocks a muscular vigor; the pinkish stones, with their deep recesses and bulges, show the effects of thousands of years of tides and storms. Joel Janowitz uses a Monet-like palette of lavenders and cool greens for the Impressionistic theme of mists, in his case the thick, wet atmosphere of a greenhouse. In "Central Chamber" Janowitz gives his hothouse the majesty of a cathedral, via a soaring, arched roof and a distant, mystical light that might have been filtered through stained glass.