

New Haven Register

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Exhibit about fear is creepy, daring and most compelling

By Judy Birke

NEW HAVEN — In a world where one is constantly bombarded with media headlines that herald the horrors of daily disasters, one can't help but take a mental and emotional lapse, now and then, from one's reaction's to these nightmares, if only to maintain one's sense of sanity.

Just in case you are currently adrift in your own peaceful horror hiatus, have no fear. A visit to the current exhibit at untitled (space) gallery at Artspace will quickly shock you back to reality, the demons it embraces, wholly congruous with the terrifying issues you tried to escape.

The show's title, "with shuddering horror pale, and eyes aghast," is a quote from John Milton's 1674 epic, "Paradise Lost," which recounts the battle between good and evil, heaven and hell, angels and demons. The exhibit is about this struggle and just how prevalent it has become in contemporary culture.

Imbued with a menacing allure, the gallery space is converted into a psychologically

ART REVIEW

- **Title:** "with shuddering horror pale, and eyes aghast"
- **Where:** untitled (space) gallery, 50 Orange St., New Haven
- **When:** Through Jan. 14, 2006; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesdays, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays; closed Dec. 25-Jan. 3, 2006
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** (203) 772-2709

charged, fearful venue in which the six participating artists take one on a harrowing journey through the dark side. Despite the diversity of media and styles — videos, paintings, collage, sculpture — the works share a common anxiety about modern civilization. Uncompromising, unsafe and unflinching, they register with an intensity that never allows one to find comfort. Neither easy to look at nor yielding easy answers, the inclusions blend fact and fiction in a disturbing, sometimes downright shocking, manner.

The stage is immediately set upon entering the gallery space.

where Randal Thurston's black silhouetted cut-outs cover the entire length of a wall with creepy repetitive symbols that augur for the horror to come.

Referencing the scene from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," when Scrooge sees the face of a dead friend transformed into a door knocker, Thurston creates a compelling decorative pattern of fear and fantasy in which the likes of skeletal heads ornamented with dead flowers and moths address tales of torment and redemption.

Daniel Hesidence's series of paintings from his "Suite of 5 Chambers Street Paintings," some fully abstract, some figurative abstractions, possess an eerie psychological ambiguity.

Horrifying images of indeterminate smears and blobs, of faces partially eaten away, of bones open to nerves, are raw and terrifying. Yet their grotesqueness is belied by the delicate gradations of the candy-colored hues that define them, establishing a dissonant tension between the horror of the narrative and the dreaminess of the colors, at once horrific

and seductive, perverse and melancholic, evil and innocent.

Corrine May Botz's color images of "The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death," a series of photos taken of dioramas of unsolved crime scenes made by a criminologist in the 1940s, reveal a prevailing mood of passive disintegration and spirit surrendered. Blown up to large proportions, these remote images possess a darkly meditative stillness that conjures up all sorts of unspoken sinister plots that register the onset of disaster or its past execution. The shots are just unclear enough to intensify one's curiosity in one's role as voyeur.

Dan Langston's hyper-realistic life-size figurative sculptures are not easy to look at. Wide-eyed, fearful, obviously past life and caring, these victims of some sort of shock or mutation remain frighteningly locked within themselves, their eyeballs woefully grasping for air, lost in a society where only the fittest survive.

Video presentations by Maciej Toporowicz and Erika Van Natta

See Creepy, D.



Dan Langston

"Arvivor's Guilt," one of Dan Langston's life-size realistic sculptures at untitled (space) gallery.

Creepy: Be very afraid, but don't miss 'shuddering'

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are alternately repellent and compelling, each drawing one in in a disturbing way that creeps under one's skin. Despite the fact that one wants to leave, one can't help but remain, the horror of the imagery appealing to that visceral fascination with the allure of fear.

Toporowicz's "Ghost Stories," is a 13-minute nightmare of unending murder and seduction. Based on Japanese horror films, the flickering black-and-white clips are complemented by a sound track of shrieks, creaks, screams, spatters, slashes, gasps and gurgles, all set to a haunting background of jazz, rock and mood music.

Van Natta's "Sara 7/16," in color and black and white, turns the horror genre from fiction to fact. Referencing the true story of a murder that took place in

a New Haven parking garage in 1973 (presumably Penny Serra's), the film blends actual interviews and television footage with reenactments and composite characters, to raise questions about the kind of person who would commit such an act, and the effect a 30-year-old-crime still has on a city's psyche.

Menacing, dangerous, chilling and gritty, both films forcefully invite an emotional reaction, fact and fiction capturing the pathos of lives cut short and the chill of those who perpetrate this brevity, with a raw and aggressive energy that becomes all the more powerful for their displays of human vulnerability.

Kudos to Denise Markonish, the show's curator, for creating yet another highly original evocative presentation.

Judy Birke of New Haven is a freelance writer and art consultant.