

Carroll County Times

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Masked reality, real portraits at Rice

By Pamela Zappardino, Art Critic

An unexpected (aren't they all?) trip to the emergency room kept me from the opening of "54 Jews and 18 Anne Franks" at the Rice Gallery in McDaniel's Peterson Hall. I thought I might miss it altogether, but the title was just too intriguing. I stole away for a bit late last Friday afternoon and made my way to campus. I'm glad I did.

Abshalom Jac Lahav has created a stunningly unusual portrait gallery. With varying degrees of abstraction and a Warhol-esque use of color, Lahav delves inside his subjects and finds mystery, illusion, emotion, shadow, form, essence and masked reality. The gallery is spare, white walls and empty space forcing the gaze to rest on the faces lining the corridor they create.

Warhol is back in the blocked placement of square portraits, stacked 4 by 3 deep against the plain wall. Subtle colors are shocked by bright lips and bold backgrounds. Many images are shadowed with a twist: mirrored turned wrong side up, missing critical components, not so much reflecting as watching.

Elie Wiesel peers out from behind the closed eyes of a self mask, colored blue. Smoke from Freud's ever present cigar clouds his alter image. A cat perches on Allen Ginsburg's head through a mousehole of hair. Monica Lewinsky, face half hidden, stands against scarlet. Noam Chomsky, noted linguist, is missing a part of his cortex.

A single Anne Frank image takes many forms, portraits backlit by day against the windows. Warhol is here, but so is Picasso and Kahlo (more in an image of Frank than in her own portrait) as Frank becomes many, perhaps all of us. There is motion, growth, fragility, strength, perseverance.

Lahav says his work "continues a tradition of portrait painting, while questioning the nature of the portrait." He asks the right questions. Far from traditional, these portraits tell us more than mere representation could have. Lahav strove for "each painting to take on its own sense of living presence to become the equivalent of an individual personality. He is successful.

On either end of the gallery, two of the most representational works face each other obliquely: Karl Marx, a critic of society, and Clement Greenberg, a critic of art, encourage a close look at what Lahav has wrought.

There are real insights here and real power. These are among the most real portraits you will see. Even if you don't recognize a soul.

Pamela Zappardino teaches art appreciation. Contact her at artzap@aol.com.

If you go

What: "54 Jews and 18 Anne Franks" by Abshalom Jac Lahav

When: Through Friday

Where: Rice Gallery at McDaniel College, 2 College Hill, Westminster

Information: www.actiondocument.com

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