

ART WATCH

THREE NEW GALLERY SHOWS TO SEE

By Ari Kambouris

Springtime, along with the annual "Art Chicago" at Navy Pier, tend to bring out the best in Chicago art. This spring is no exception, and many galleries are bringing out the finest of their stables. Four shows of particular interest are Sarah Krepp's work at the Roy Boyd gallery, Salvatore Pecoraro's pieces at the Klein gallery, and a group show of artists represented by Nancy Lurie at a loft she rented on W. Chicago. All are worth the extra time it takes to make the tour of these galleries, where one can take a look at a good deal of art seldom seen in Chicago.

Sarah Krepp's work has changed quite a bit since her last show at the Roy Boyd Gallery. The changes have come in the introduction of gestural strokes into her work, and, in this batch of paintings, an incredible vibrancy and energy in her use of color. Her previous format was restricted to short brush strokes in distinct lines which merged and lost the orderliness of the format as the painting progressed. This show includes three paintings that were done during her transition to the new gestures, and it is evident that her underlying intentions carry over from her previous work. There are still those lines of brush strokes composed of color upon color, but they seem to become subordinated to the new sweeping strokes.

The basic color in this show is red. Not just one shade of red, but several different chromas. The effect is staggering. All of the paintings display an astonishing degree of energy and radiance; it is almost as if the viewer must shield his or her eyes because of the intensity. There is a definite joy to looking at the works, but the composition goes far beyond mere appearances. The order that comes from all of the disorder is quite apparent (All of the strokes seem to have a distinct reason for being placed where they are. In several of the paintings, Krepp's older style emerges amidst all of the gestures. While the old strokes have a definite and very evident organization, the gestures also have an organization all their own, although the viewer might have to search a bit to find it.

As important in her work as the brush strokes and gestures are the colors that Krepp uses. Although the surface appears predominantly red, there are several layers of colors and strokes underneath the surface. At times, these colors show up through the reds and often contrast them, bringing the surface to life and depth. A red stroke will be laid directly over a complimentary blue strokes in such a way that only a thin line of blue is visible. Yet because of the combination of colors, the blue will jump out in front of the red. This is just one example of Krepp's use of color, but try to imagine it going on all over the canvas and you might be able to imagine the movement and depth of the works.

For me, these works are intensely interesting because of the duality (and seeming contradiction) of the ideas which they are focusing on. It doesn't appear, on first glance at the paintings that there could be any order to this mass of brush strokes and

that also contains some quite fine work.

After going through the Roy Boyd show, you should go over to the Klein gallery (a mere few blocks away on Huron St.) and see the plexiglass and air brush constructions of Salvatore Pecoraro. These works are some of the most unusual and intriguing wall pieces I have seen. Pecoraro, a California artist, sets the pieces out from the wall an inch or two to give a floating effect that is quite congruous with the light, airy quality of the work. However, "airy" does not imply vacuous. The pieces deal with the effects of light and refraction by using the plexiglass and the air brush to provide shadows (if they can be called shadows) and gradients of light. All of the works in the show use a plexiglass shelf on a piece of plexiglass backing as the foundation for the rest of the piece. Pecoraro sets other pieces of plexi on these shelves, sometimes clear, sometimes colored, sometimes painted, in order to contrast the background or the clear pieces on the shelf.

On the shelves, Pecoraro juxtaposes air-brushed plexi with the clear plexi, both types cut in geometric shapes, and there is a similarity in the way in which the light changes on both elements. The air-brushed piece usually deals with the evolution of one color to another, or one shade to another in through a very subtle gradation of the transition. The clear plexi refracts the light in a similar manner — the light changes as it passes through the glass in a very subtle way, reflecting on the background. On the larger pieces, there are grooves cut into the shelf so that the geometric elements can be moved around to form different designs, thus changing the pattern of the refraction, but not always changing the gradation of the light.

One of the more intriguing aspects of these works is the sense of weightlessness

that they exude. In addition to floating off the wall, the viewer can look through all of the layers that make up the work. I think that part of this weightless quality lies exactly in that there are layers, and yet the depth created by these layers is very open and spacious. Even the thickest pieces of plexiglass seem very light, despite their thickness and the fact that at times, they are opaquely painted. The legerity of the pieces allows the viewer to respond to them in terms of experiences, places, or moments that he or she might consider equally ethereal (the openness of the lakeshore, or a large field, readily come to mind in this context).

Another interesting change from more conventional art is that Pecoraro, in some of the works, allows the viewer to change the relationship between the painted and clear elements and between the elements and the light. This allows the viewer to become a part in the artist's aesthetic decision. It should be noted that this aspect of the work is both good and bad, as the viewer can experiment with the elements, out in doing so, may move away from the immediate intentions of the artist. There will undoubtedly be a great number of people who believe that this airy, spacious quality implies a certain vacuousness in the work, (after all this is certainly not in the Chicago tradition), but I think that the work serves to draw the viewer into making associations between personal feelings and the qualities in the work. Pecoraro's controlled use of light on the immediate, visual level leads the viewer into a dialogue with the works, to which the viewer brings his own realm of experience. It is a most effective juxtaposition that Pecoraro introduces between the hard-edged, geometric and rigid plexiglass, tempered by the paint and light and the visionary, ethereal, almost romantic images that are conjured up in the viewers mind. And, as Pecoraro says, "its very California."