

CMCA 2010 BIENNIAL

Phillip Isaacson - 2010

Portland Herald Press/Maine Sunday Telegram

CLAIRE SEIDL

And now some thoughts about the 2010 Biennial at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art.

The fact that there is a biennial is a cause for celebration. Biennials are features of their appointed summers, and their ending would be a significant cultural loss to this state.

That loss would be measured by the disappearance of the event itself and by the elimination of a debut opportunity for a couple of dozen underserved artists.

The current biennial is particularly poignant. That it could be mounted by CMCA -- the keystone of contemporary Maine art -- at a time of perilous funding confers a high emotional value to it. You can feel it when you walk through the show. It is not a question of this event being the medium -- the art is -- but this year, the race is a close one.

What is the standard of this biennial? It is a fulfilling event. The quality level is as solid as in years past, although I cannot say that notable discoveries are provided. There is a minimal amount of sculpture and a surprisingly small photographic component.

"West Gardiner Road" by Kenneth Deprez touches my taste for book form, photography, altered photographs and whimsy. Through a signature of two pages, Deprez provides mysterious images of the bridges, abutments and detritus along a habitually traveled Maine road. He finds things remarkable in the ordinary.

So does Michael Alpert in his gelatin silver print "Auburn, Maine." An apparently vacant old-frame shoe plant stares back at the viewer. It is as mat-

ter-of-fact and non-judgmental as an image of a water tank by the Bechers.



ONE MISSISSIPPI

Case Conover's "Everything Tree" is memorable. Created by innumerable stamped impressions against a white sheet, it has the quality of a meticulously achieved pen-and-ink drawing. The stampings lose their individual identities in the process, and the effect is of an interweaving, darkening and subsiding as the impressions rise from bottom to top. The result is a landscape that's animated, restless and not a little mysterious.

"One Mississippi" by Claire Seidl is singular in this event for its introspection. An oil on linen, there is a sense of peering into the work and being met by forms emerging from it. The resulting tension sits just below the surface

of the painting -- a concept that, by feeling at least, has Asian antecedents.

Susan Cooney's "Ram Island" and "Bald Island" are tiny wonders in graphite or photoetched-like landscapes. They are irresistible of their kind. Kenny Cole's typographic drawings elude me in their message, but charm me in the visual employment of their forms, and Scott Reed's pen-and-ink, dealing with riding the circuits of stars and walks on undescribed spaces, is irresistible in its undefined intent and in the fluency of its execution.

There are 40 or more other artists exhibiting in this fine, wide-ranging event. It warrants two visits.

Philip Isaacson of Lewiston has been writing about the arts for the Maine Sunday Telegram for 45 years.