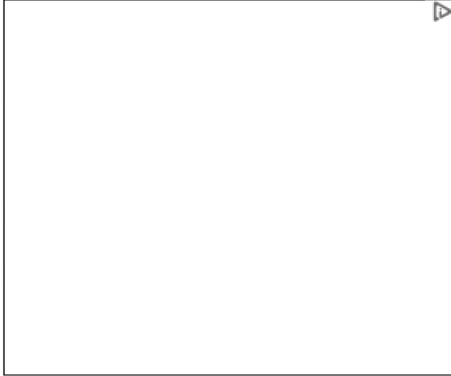




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Sublime Gifts

*Donations from Norton collection make up contemporary show at the Carnegie.***November 18, 2000** | JOSEF WOODARD | SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

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Utopian digital technology may still be far from a reality, but computers are a fact of life. They even affect the cultural sector, where some power players have taken to patronage and art collecting.

That's something one can't help but ponder while wandering through the Carnegie Art Museum, where the current show comes courtesy of respected contemporary art collectors Eileen and Peter Norton. Peter Norton is the face of the fix-it man on software packages such as Norton Utilities and Norton Anti-Virus. The Nortons have maintained a passion for contemporary art and have given 30 works to the Carnegie.

Many of the artists in the show, called "Defining the Sublime: Gifts from the Eileen and Peter Norton Collection," are young, emerging artists from California. One of the few with ready-name recognition is Los Angeles-based Eric Orr, whose sculptures often deal with the elements, sometimes incorporating fire and water. In the case of "Edge of Light," a thin band of light peeks through a flat panel of bronze and gold leaf, as if providing a glimpse of illumination.

In another work, Alexander--just Alexander--concocts optically-oriented sculptures, using tiny, thin rods painted various colors and fastidiously arranged to suggest shapes in negative space.

With this group of contemporary young artists, it's not enough for a painting to just be a painting, at least not in the conventional sense. Julian Gambill's deceptively simple "Dialogue of Generations" is a painting of oddly balanced elements. A large red orb is attached by string to the ground. Otherwise, it looks as if it would break away. Squares of yellow and blue seem to represent fundamental components of the landscape. It's a painting that finds its own quirky path between abstraction and the landscape tradition.

The venerable materials of oil paintings are subject to artful abuse in Carla Pagliaro's untitled piece. Canvas has been crumpled and affixed to hunks of baby blue plywood. Julian Goldwhite mixes a minimalist's directness and color-giddy pranksterism with his dizzy fluorescent orange oil paint on cibatool.

In the highly charged conceptual atmosphere created by this art, the viewer is on the alert for clues, ironies and subplots. That very sense of cautious inquiry may be a central theme in Therman Statom's "Watch Out for the Snakes When You Are Looking for Diamonds." It's an abstract painting to which are affixed various scruffy objects, including a die and rough hunks of glass, dime store stand-ins for jewels.

More found object fun, in a weirdly hermetic package, can be found in "Box #32 (The Official Stitch and Hide Procedure Series)." The materials for this piece include the "artist's burdensome possessions, tarp, dental floss, glass . . ." Here, the said lumps of junk are wrapped up ritualistically in tarp, tied with floss and put under glass, as if they were treasured items. Or, more to the point, the art lies in the process of turning trivial personal objects into the stuff of, well, the sublime.

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One of the quietest works in the show, hung on a back wall in the gallery, exerts a potent, if arid, charm. Jeff Beal's deadpan post-conceptualism is a triptych of relief pieces on plywood. In the middle is what can be read as the literal centerpiece, a low-contrast black-and-white photograph of the sea with a sailboat barely visible in the distance. On the right, a piece of the same size has a gray-streaked wax coating that mirrors the bland gray tones in the photograph, while the panel on the left is simply plain laminated plywood. The piece appears to be an exercise in sequential seeing, but it also playfully dismantles expectations.

Suffice to say that the Norton gifts will both enrich and expand the Carnegie's permanent collection and challenge the uninitiated viewer's conception of what art in Oxnard looks like.

DETAILS

"Defining the Sublime: Gifts from the Eileen and Peter Norton Collection" at the Carnegie Art Museum, 424 South C St., Oxnard, 385-8157. Through Nov. 26. Reopening Dec. 9-Jan. 28. Hours: Thursday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. Cost \$3 general, \$2 students and seniors; \$1 ages 6-16.

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