

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

ART REVIEWS/Helen A. Harrison

An Overstuffed Bear of an Exhibition

'The World of Theodore Roosevelt'

Nassau County Museum of Art, One Museum Drive, Roslyn Harbor, (516) 484-9337. Through Feb. 16.

Theodore Roosevelt was a pampered city boy who became a rugged outdoorsman, a warrior who won the Nobel Peace Prize, and a big game hunter who championed wildlife conservation, among other seemingly contradictory roles. As he once remarked, "I have enjoyed as much of life as any nine men I know."

This exhibition — which includes paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints, furniture, political cartoons, photographs, documents, clothing and assorted memorabilia — ranges far and wide in trying to encompass Roosevelt's outsized personality, as well as his social, political, economic and domestic milieu. The curators could not decide whether to focus on the man or to examine his times, so they did both. In an unintentional case of art mirroring life, they came up with a display that serves as a metaphor for Roosevelt himself: enough material for nine exhibitions, stuffed into one.

Chronological organization brings some order to the presentation, but the cumulative effect overwhelms. The viewer is constantly seasawed between Roosevelt's public and private personas and shuttled among his various worlds, among them Sagamore Hill, his beloved retreat in Oyster Bay.

Many of the art works, extensively interpreted in wall labels, illustrate his career, including his stint as New York City's police commissioner, his military service in the Spanish-American War and his two terms as President. Others depict the places he frequented and the people he met, whether in the gilded corridors of power or around a campfire in the wilderness. Some of his personal possessions, reflecting his own taste and the aesthetics of the period, are also on display.

Roosevelt was apparently such a dominant figure, that when he was in the room, everything else took second place. That's what happens in these galleries.

'Sammy Dent: Organic Abstraction'

Port Washington Public Library, One Library Drive, Port Washington, (516) 883-4400. Through Jan. 30.

Ms. Dent's large, vibrant canvases carry on the tradition of Abstract Expressionism,



with its reliance on spontaneous gesture and its avoidance of representational imagery. The paintings recall those of Helen Frankenthaler, who, like Ms. Dent, contrasts translucent areas of stained pigment with thick calligraphic strokes and linear elements to create forms that float in pictorial space.

Although Ms. Dent describes her aim as achieving a balance between the figurative and the abstract, references to specific subject matter are minimized to the point of dissolution. Her primary subject is color itself, which may or may not coalesce into recognizable objects.

Sometimes the titles offer likely interpre-

tations, as in "Egg," with its suggestion of an embryonic cell dividing within an encircling white enclosure, or in "Life's a Peach," with its fruit-like shape, or in "Jealousy II," in which an aggressive green blob spews its bile at an equally explosive red-orange antagonist.

But more often the titles seem to indicate a place, time or state of mind rather than a subject. "Bangkok," for example, might be an amalgam of impressions created by multicolored cloth banners tossed by a breeze, perhaps something the British-born artist glimpsed during her travels. In "Buddha's Birthday," a floating mass of pink, red and orange, trailing purple tendrils tipped with orange and turquoise, conjures the advent of a brilliant jellyfish rather than the birth of an Asian philosopher.

Whether their titles explain or obscure their meanings, Ms. Dent's paintings can be enjoyed without the benefit of such intimations. Their appeal lies in their gestural verve and the artist's love of chromatic interplay, resulting in imagery that alludes to nature while seldom picturing it.

'Winter Selections'

Alpan Gallery, 2 West Carver Street, Huntington, (631) 423-4433. Through Feb. 15.

Many of the artists in this group show share Ms. Dent's interest in painterly abstraction, but with different results. Several use color both as imagery in its own right and as a concealing device.

Eleanor Schimmel's untitled encaustic paintings — one luminously pearly, the other a glowing red over equally intense blue — use thick crusts of pigment to create multilayered surfaces into which she carves linear swirls and circles. In Anne Raymond's "Now," the canvas seems to emit a shimmering cloud of warmth that envelops cooler undertones.

Sylvia Harnick's "Re/Bounded Memories" allows the viewer to peek beneath the surface by peeling away successive layers of paint, the way a weathered wall documents its own history. Frank Wimberley blocks access to an imaginary vista beyond the picture plane in "Tarred Skylight, Interior View," which cleverly confounds the notion of a painting as a window on the outside world.

Carla Beyers creates a three-dimensional surface by building up a pattern of shadowy strokes embedded in what appears to be layered acrylic polymer; the effect is like the aftermath of a pillow fight in the dark. In



Janet Nolan's "Twister No. 9," far left, is on view at the Alpan Gallery in Huntington; "Return of the Conquerors" (1899), left, is part of the Teddy Roosevelt show at the Nassau County Museum of Art; and Sammy Dent's "Bangkok" is on display at the Port Washington Public Library.

"Black Thorn" and "Red Ryder," David Geiser wraps references to plant life in blankets of translucent color that refer to the earth, water and sun that nurture the spiky growths.

Two of the artists make imaginative use of recycled materials. Janet Nolan's "Twister No. 9" is a construction of old umbrella frames, stripped of their fabric and crunched together as if by the force of a powerful wind. Their sad carcasses are revitalized by wrappings of colorful, cloth-

covered wire, which transform them from useless relics into a whimsical, Judy Pfaff-inspired sculpture.

Used tea bags provide Gulsen Calik with an unlikely but effective basis for a visual diary, drawn on the bags themselves, which are arranged on the wall like pages from a travel sketchbook. The result, "Voyage to Cai," is a mosaic of ink and watercolor vignettes chronicling encounters on a journey of discovery that is more spiritual than actual.