

Art in two's by four

By KURT GUTKNECHT

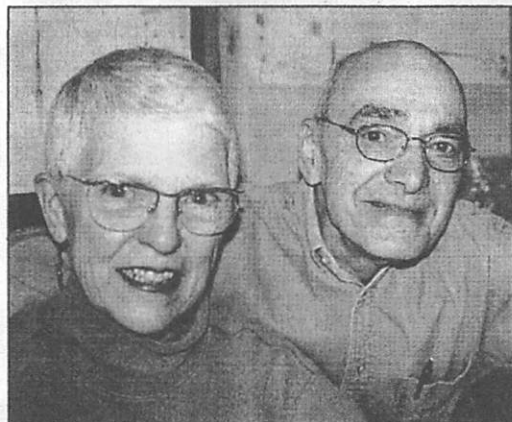
Fitchburg Star Editor

The emotional intensity fostered in human dyads can spawn some of our basest and noblest instincts, as evidenced, for example, by the gulf between savage divorces and the exuberant frisson of sexual attraction.

The most recent show at Promega's BioPharmaceutical Technology Center celebrates the latter tradition with

expression. But you can also forget all that and appreciate the textures and colors without worry about the larger context. The business about couples will arise naturally.

Great art can result from savage relationships, hence the wildly popular idea that there's a symbiotic relationship between creativity and personal nastiness. If that's



Audrey and Tom Sargeant of Madison.

its focus on two "committed couples," a deliberately fuzzy expression that reflects the diversity of relationships as well as the couples' relationship to their art.

How does a relationship affect art? It's a silly question — of course, every experience affects art — but then again, it's also relevant since emotions are the palimpsest for all expression, and few relationships approach the intensity and duration of relationships characteristic of couples of all stripes.

This exhibit raises more questions than it answers, both about couples and about

the case here, the artists aren't letting on in the slightest. It's possible to discern common strands in the work of each couple, but it's impossible to determine whether the similarities reflect their relationship or the fact that they shared pasta salad for lunch a week ago. And the closer you strain to identify the similarities, the more elusive they become.

The exhibit, featuring the work of Audrey and Tom Sargeant of Madison, and Roselyn Titaud and Elzevir of Saint-Etienne, France, demonstrate how ideas flicker between people, leaving



Roselyn Titaud and Elzevir, Saint-Etienne, France.

traces but never swamping individuality.

The artists' works are both colorful and calming, using familiar approaches to lead us to challenging — and sometimes mischievous — terrain.

After 48 years of marriage, Audrey and Tom Sargeant selected divergent artistic paths. She has been a fiber artist since 1998, after a career as a registered nurse and 12 years as a potter.

The demands of pottery — mixing clay, firing kilns — and the isolation associated with the craft left her feeling "burned out," she said. She turned to fiber art, which she found just as demanding but not as isolating.

Her works assemble themselves, she said. She starts by creating designs on fabric, selected by color and surface design, which she assembles into quilts whose textures and colors guide the subsequent composition.

Her compositions vary widely in color and size and materials, and, as noted in the press release, draw the viewer into the "puzzle of assembly." And it's not just fabric. Several of her works incor-

porate copper in various shapes and forms, including one intriguing assembly with copper mesh.

Tom Sargeant has always nursed a hankering for art, and finally put it on the top burner in 1995 after a career as a doctor. At first, he said they met at an art exhibit in Miami but later admits that they met in a hospital operating room. He prefers the first version because it's "less gruesome."

If the Sergeants have had their gruesome moments, they appear to have been few and far between. Their work reflects an understated exuberance bordering on playfulness, which isn't surprising considering the spontaneity they bring to their work and the obvious delight they take in each other's company.

"I tell people that I started medicine so I could afford art," he says.

His heavily layered acrylics (often 20 or 30 coats) employ "very earthy colors, nothing brilliant or piercing," he said, that highlight textures, abstract shapes and lines.

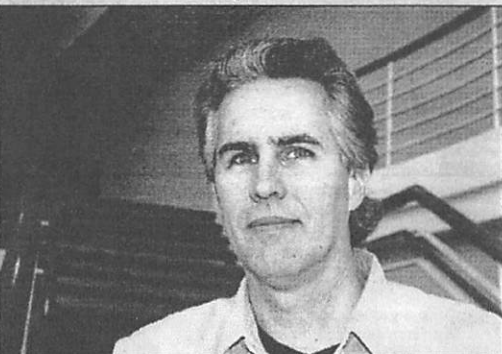
Until children are in fourth grade, they naturally draw abstract objects, said Tom. They quit when they're told that "pictures are supposed to 'show' something. Some of us have a chance to become childish again," he said.

Fitchburg's cultural mecca

Promega's exhibits of works by 'emerging' artists usually attract community interest

By KURT GUTKNECHT

Fitchburg Star Editor



Daniel Swadener, curator of the latest exhibit at Promega.

The dichotomy of art vs. science has been muted at Promega Corporation, which has sponsored artists' showcases since 1996.

Daniel Swadener, curator of the exhibits, said he selects works by "emerging artists" in eclectic formats and subjects, including African art, women's art, fiber art and leather.

Sometimes he knows the artists. Sometimes he encounters them "serendipitously." Sometimes he has a theme in mind and sometimes the themes suggest themselves.

There are four shows annually at the firm's BioPharmaceutical Technology Center, 5445 East Cheryl Parkway.

Works are exhibited in the building's spacious first floor and second story foyer. One show features works by employees and their families.

"We have some really talented people here," said Swadener, whose friendship with the firm's founder precedes the company's founding in 1978.

Swadener currently resides in Arizona but has deep roots in the region, and his wife founded the day care center next to the firm.

The community has been extremely supportive of the shows, he said. The receptions for artists attracts 100 to 300 people. And while he can't tell how many are Fitchburg residents, he suspects that the community is well represented.

The exhibit is open to the public weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and by appointment. The latest works will be on display through June 15.

"We play off each other, even if we don't copy each other," he added. During a recent show, they were hanging works around the corner from each other. When Audrey stepped back to look at the exhibit, she was startled to realize that much of

their work "looked as if it had been done by the same person," she said.

Somewhat surprisingly, Madison is relatively inhospitable terrain for abstract art, said Tom, nor have cust-

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omers shown much interest in Audrey's fiber art. That doesn't deter either of them. They admit they are having fun.

The couple from France didn't mention fun in the same sentence as art, but it's clear that they are having some of both. Their work is also original and accessible and, yes, occasionally unnerving.

Roselyn Titaud says her work "tries to create an atmosphere with colors and similarities and differences in form. I try to make a story using images that don't have a story."

Of course, there's never no story, which is why we viewers are intrigued by her selections, many of which combine black and white photographs with color photographs.

She said her works often arise spontaneously although some are sparked by a desire to create a puzzle. "It's like a game," she said.

Both her works and that of her significant other, Elzevir, involve two parts. His are much larger -- all are on wood divided into two sections, joined to create a work more than six feet high and three feet wide --and also juxtapose images that he says are guided by similarities. Many of his combinations are startling, employing somber images from well known artists with, for example, a photograph of one of our contemporary viscounts, Bill Gates of Microsoft fame. Some of his work has coupled cartoon caricatures with historical figures, while others keep the comparisons on a human scale.

"We are the same," said Elzevir. "Those who lived two centuries ago had similar emotions. We have more technology today, and perhaps we have changed intellectually, but we have not changed in spirit."

Indeed. These are spirited works. They play with our definitions of similarities and differences, leaving us a little less sure of our ability to categorize life.



Clockwise from top left are two fiber works by Audrey Sargeant, two works by Elzevir (not included in this show), a work by Tom Sargeant, and a work by Roelyne Titaud. Colors shown in photographs may not accurately represent colors of the works.

