

ART

SPOTLIGHT: 'BEFORE THERE WERE MOVIES'

Ian Kennedy, curator of European painting and sculpture at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, speaks at 7 tonight in the museum's Atkins Auditorium, about the entertainment

value of 19th century painting. His free lecture, "Before There Were Movies: Art as a Window on the World of 19th-century France," is in conjunction with the ongoing exhibition, "A

Magnificent Age: French Paintings From the Walters Art Museum." Go early and see the show first — admission to the exhibit is free on Fridays.

— Alice Thorson/The Star



PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Joseph Nease celebrates five years, highlights artists' evolutions

By ELISABETH KIRSCH
Special to The Star

The current show at Joseph Nease isn't your typical, yawn-inducing summer exhibition.

"Is/Was" actually works because it has a loose — very loose — theme. Nease asked each of the gallery's 12 artists to pick a work (or works) from five years ago, when the gallery opened, and then to choose a current artwork to play off the earlier one. The artists involved clearly had some fun with this, which is why the show engages.

All of the artists live in Kansas City or have some affiliation with the city, e.g., they attended the Kansas City Art Institute or taught at the school.

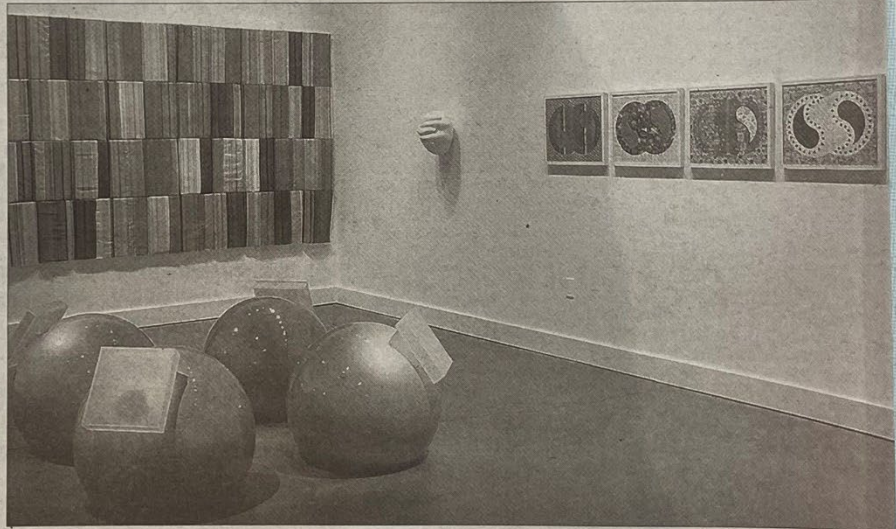
Raissa Venables, Eric Sall and Rachel Hayes were all students at KCAI in 1998, and it's noteworthy that their work from five years ago, while not as assured as their current art, was clearly ripe with promise even then. It's genuinely intriguing to chronicle an artist's professional growth, and that's one of the highlights of this show.

Venables' new digital work, with its neon color and dizzying spatial perspective, is powerful. Hayes demonstrates once again why she's one of the best textile-oriented artists around. The one misleading note here is Eric Sall's contribution of small digital prints, hot off the press. Sall is clearly still experimenting here, and a viewer unfamiliar with this talented artist's style would not guess he's better known as a painter. These new pieces lack the bravado and ambition of Sall's big, edgy and colorful abstractions, but who knows where they may lead.

Other artists also have made changes in their work, and there are tugs when one looks at both the old and the new. James Brinsfield's vinyl, paper and plastic film collages from today are intelligent and witty, but after looking at his two small, skilled and sensuous oil and enamel paintings from yesteryear, one hopes this artist will not abandon painting forever.

Nate Fors' earlier conceptual and text-oriented work, such as the show's 1997 "Washington Cross Dressing the Delaware," is also sly and engrossing and reminds us why Fors is one of the few regional artists to have been graced with a one-person exhibit at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. For this viewer, however, it's hard not to prefer the more light-hearted, abstract, colorful and sensuous art Fors now makes, although he exhibits only a small-scale model of a proposed sculpture in this show.

Susan White, known for her organically shaped sculpture made from natural materials, surprises here with a video piece from



Lester Goldman's "Boxcar," (foreground), Rachel Hayes' "Palate Expansion" and Karen Owsley Nease's "Mr & Mrs. Paisley" are part of the five-year retrospective exhibit at Joseph Nease Gallery.

THE SHOW

"Is/Was: 5 Years at Joseph Nease Gallery" continues at Joseph Nease Gallery, 1819 Central, through Aug. 2. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday and by appointment. The gallery will be open by appointment only from Aug. 3 to Aug. 31. Call (816) 421-2166 for information.

2001 based on her collaboration with the city of Salina, Kan., and the local Tony's Pizza company there. Meatballs, tomato sauce and shredded cheese become something else again under White's direction, and more videos should be in this artist's future.

Several artists made new works specifically for this exhibit. James Woodfill's "New Signal Group (Did/Does)" kinetic installation work combines elements from his work of five years ago — rotating light fixtures — with a carefully polished trash can that contains all the trademark elements of this artist's elegant, minimal and humorous style.

Lester Goldman's pared-down, four-part Volkswagen-green "Boxcar" is one of his most appealing sculptures ever; the restraint here pays off. In contrast, Shaun Cassidy's contribution, also a lime-green sculpture, is obsessively constructed and dense with implied narrative. Mystery is often an underlying component in Cassidy's work, whatever media he works in, as is evident here also in his 1995 drawing "#45."

Karen Owsley Nease's earlier black-and-white drawings are stark and restrained in comparison to her new, richly patterned and densely designed mixed media works, but both groups are appealing. Likewise, Marcie Miller Gross is equally at ease with two very different bodies of work. The 1999 "Elemental Knowledge" is a sensuous "book" made from sod, beeswax and steel, while "Compress" is a work of "domestic" minimalism incorporating hospital towels placed in a pared-down grid. Stephen Fleming's two untitled clay wall works also are deceptively simple, but with their references to animal flesh they have a visceral impact of a decidedly different nature. As different as all these artists are from one

NEASE TO CLOSE TEMPORARILY

The Joseph Nease Gallery will close for two years at the end of 2003.

"The reasons for the hiatus are many," says Nease, co-owner of the gallery with his wife, artist Karen Owsley Nease, "but they relate mainly to the need for us to take time off to attend to some personal activities that we have not had the time for."

The gallery will go ahead with its planned fall 2003 solo shows of Kansas City artists Nate Fors and Marcie Miller Gross, said Nease, who stresses that the two-year closing is temporary.

— Alice Thorson/The Star

another, their work shares certain elements: a feel for color, abstraction, materials and surface all put together in the most provocative of ways. An undercurrent of narrative runs through all this work as well, sustaining our interest for the long run.