

Exhibits at Romany Kramoris Raise Questions

BY MARION WOLBERG-WEISS



A continuing issue in the art world concerns the nature of a fine art gallery. Does fine art mean that paintings can't be shown with other items, like furniture and rugs, for example? Another concern is whether crafts can also be art. Sag Harbor's Romany Kramoris Gallery has confronted both subjects in

the 38 years that owner Kramoris has been at the present location.

The space is a one-of-a-kind venue where jewelry, vases, art books and unusual pieces from around the world mix with special exhibits. The current

show, Linda Stein's sculpture and bully-proof vests, is a case-in-point where fine art stands out among the grab bag of items appealing to the senses. Stein is a well-known feminist artist who shows regularly at her New York gallery. She is also involved in a tour where her work is shown at universities and art centers throughout the United States.

The bully-proof vests derive from Stein's previous series, "Knights of Protection" and "Warrior Women," and are intriguing in their own right. The use of fabric and thread belies the notion that the material should



Linda Stein empowers through Wonder Woman.

be made of metal and leather like Stein's sculptures. In fact, her vests are smooth and comfortable, not at all like what we would expect from something called "bulletproof."

This contradiction is followed by another one. The surface of the vests presents different images in a patchwork pattern, indicating a quilt, the quilt serving as a metaphor for home and country. There are other opposing juxtapositions. Consider Stein's depiction of Wonder Woman, with her sexy body and her masculine stance.

Wonder Woman's statement on a vest's pocket, "I've always felt that girls should be as mobile as boys," makes us smile. What also gets our attention is an image of an ammunition belt near a religious figure. Is Stein commenting on the struggle between war and spirituality? If so, that's a move beyond her feminist rhetoric. No matter. It's all food-for-thought.



Stein's "bully-proof" vests

Another exhibit, paintings by Christopher Engel, is full of contradictions, as well. Consider his portraits of power, with men wearing crowns. Yet, Engel uses a simple, primitive style to convey these ideas. We aren't sure who the subjects are; perhaps the Three Wise Men or Knights of the Round Table, but we like guessing.

A few portraits are obvious: one with the title "Saint" and another one that appears to be the Madonna and Child. What's interesting are the geometric configurations: triangles, circles and rectangles. (Circular shapes might mean eternity, for example.) The most intriguing example is the Madonna and Child, which is positioned in a frame-within-a-frame. To this critic, at least, the frame means a reference to the outside world.

Finally, a wooden horse by the gallery's entrance by Lautaro and Franco Cuttica is proof that craft can be art. The animal seems like it is composed of driftwood, with metal and leather parts. It is a patchwork of sorts, recalling Stein's vests. What a small world. 🐎

The exhibits will be on view at Sag Harbor's Romany Kramoris Gallery (41 Main Street) until August 31 and available for viewing by request. Call 631-725-2499.