

America, America

Boys to men, household glass and the U.S.-Japan connection.

**Gabrielle Russomagno: Photography
Sandra Scicchitani: Recent Prints and Paintings**

Muse Gallery, 60 N. 2nd St., through July 23 (627-5310).

**Koji Shimizu: New Paintings on Paper
Evan Snyderman: New Glass Sculpture**

Pentimenti Gallery, 133 N 3rd St., through July 16 (625-9990).

The majority and the best of Gabrielle Russomagno's photographs at Muse Gallery depict the ritual behaviors of

white middle-class adolescent boys: youths training to succeed to the patriarchy. The black and white gelatin silver prints are part of a series entitled "The Story of Boys and Girls." These 13 pictures tell part of the adolescent boys' story.

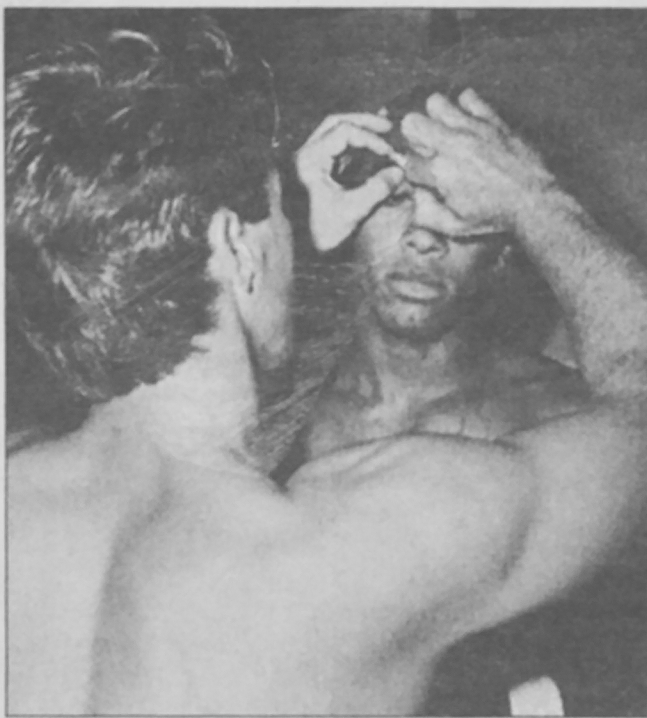
Russomagno records healthy American specimens fine-tuning their attitude: two boys urinate in the snow; a young man lounging by a Pontiac arrogantly blows smoke at the photographer.

These boys are disturbing because they are on the cusp of manhood, still mostly smooth-skinned and androgynous. Most are athletic and physically appealing. A weight lifter gazes sleepily

from the bench, sated with exercise, his hands still outstretched to the weights. The handsome curly-haired *Mane Man* looks blandly from his automobile. He anticipates, yet feigns to disdain, our admiration.

In many ways Russomagno's subjects are *men*: They can procreate and they can kill (though she does not show them doing either). They are just the right age for cannon fodder. Already they have learned to conceal their angst and to run in packs.

There is something a little sad about their apparent self-satisfaction and seamless enmeshment in a social context, but this impression may be partly due to the photogra-



Photograph from the series *The Story of Boys and Girls* by Gabrielle Russomagno.

pher's manifest appreciation of seductive physical surfaces. Russomagno perhaps pays more attention to animal beauty than to psychological drama: She has not sought Cartier-Bresson's "Decisive Moment," but rather a physical/social stage in development.

Russomagno is particularly attuned to moods of utter self-absorption. Like Dorothea Lange, she frequently captures a glance which acknowledges the photographer as a presence but not as a player in the drama. And, like Lange, she participates voyeuristically in the events she records — here, strangely, allowed to share rites of passage like group head-shaving in a bathroom.

But where Lange's Depression-era migrants arouse our compassion with their stoical acceptance, these youths often strike me as personally and culturally narcissistic. Perhaps I am projecting my prejudices and fears into a more objective document. In any case, it is one worth studying.

Also at Muse Gallery, Sandra Scicchitani is showing small paintings and collographs related to petroglyphs in New Mexico. All the works are dominated by paired colors, but more hues are present. Layers of contrasting paint or blended pigments (in the collographs) permit Scicchitani to suggest both the texture of stone and a very low relief; however, Scicchitani's strong hues do not reproduce the neutral colors of stone. Her essentially two-tone combinations vary from orange/purple to peach/yellow or chartreuse/plum.

Most of these paintings and prints contain a single complex shape, a silhouetted figure on an undifferentiated ground. Angles and curves combine, frequently presenting pointed

forms or saw-tooth contours, though rectangles are also suggested. *Lights that Shine* includes an open rectangle that fits neatly into the picture. All eight *Images from the Very First Stories* also contain one or two straight lines passing through the pictorial space.

Each shape is flat, though usually pierced, Henry Moore-like. Simultaneously organic and mechanical, these shapes are not direct transcriptions of petroglyphs. In fact, none is representational and few look symbolic, but they do look like they are in the *process* of looking like something. That is, they have the elements of objects which we might be on the verge of identifying. There is contrast in light and dark, and in hue. There clearly are edges. One might postulate that Scicchitani is groping toward a representation of the process of visual comprehension itself, and linking this to the evolution of mark-making and representation, which seems like a reasonable thing to do.

At Pentimenti Gallery Koji Shimizu provocatively approaches cultural links and disjunctions between the United States and Japan. His attitude is disengaged but not dispassionate.

Shimizu works on paper, freely painting linear images in black or colored inks, then glazing and preserving the paper with acrylic medi-

um. An unframed wall-size yellow sunburst composed of wedges of paper is more durable than it looks. In this piece, Shimizu has attempted to connect dates as they are commonly written in the West with dates as properly linked with the Emperor's reign in Japan. I say "attempted" because the artist makes frequent errors which he crudely paints out and corrects, thus demonstrating the pointless complexity of

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having to deal with two systems.

Another large work depicts the Enola Gay and, in a third, a yellow flower veils a radiation symbol, a bomb image (embedded in another version of the flower shape), a

bomber, a radiation cloud and a breaking wave — perhaps the cliché *Great Wave* of Hokusai or perhaps the fabled tidal wave which long ago saved Japan from foreign invaders.

In the same show, sculptor Evan Snyderman has fun with glass objects which represent mechanical things and which occasionally incorporate real parts from household objects. His glass telephone has a real cord, for example. But all Snyderman's work has a ductile fairy-tale rotundity. His blender bender, as I'd call it, looks as if it were caught in a very high wind, and his real stovetop with glass pots and pans (which faithfully resemble enameled metal) combine funky found objects with fairly faithful copies.

An informal installation places an orange chair which was once attached to a professional-style hair dryer before a glass television set. In perhaps Snyderman's only lapse of judgment in fabrication, he's covered the screen area of the television with duct tape. The color is right, but the sticky and discontinuous nature of the duct tape is all too obvious.

Shelves in the gallery contain full-scale box cameras and a more toy-like class of glass: miniaturized airplanes and helicopters cuter than the Duchess of York's Budgie cartoon character.