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ART; Creative Works With a Political Edge

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

DURING the last half of the month, New Haven has been staging "Art and Ideas," an elaborate annual festival that encompasses all the arts. Many of the ideas are political and that theme is being aired in lectures and panel discussions involving almost all of the city's cultural institutions.

Some places, like the Yale Center for British Art, were able to neatly fold long-running summer exhibitions into the festival.

But some of the smaller offerings were created just for the festival, including the sculptures by Anna Broell Bresnick. A couple of her sculptures were made in conjunction with dance performances: "Audubon Boogie Woogie" and "Garden of Delight." Another sculpture, "Neighborhood Bauhaus," was displayed for a few days on New Haven Green.

Ms. Bresnick's installation, "Audubon Boogie Woogie," is perched in the trees lining Audubon Street and will remain there until the end of the month. On two occasions the flat-grid structures served like triumphal banners for a 15-member dance troop led by Susan Metheke, which made its way down the cobbled street. But the structures still retained their significance after the dancers had departed.

The grids, made of a lightweight plastic, were inspired by Mondrian's late painting, "Broadway Boogie Woogie," work that was rather exuberant for him in his geometric idiom. But his rigid style had its origins in nature, and the marriage of grid to leafy tree might be a reminder of that. Ms. Bresnick said she had been thinking about Audubon, painter of birds, because trees are naturally hospitable to birds.

Ms. Bresnick said her mother had studied at the Bauhaus, and some of the spareness of that style is reflected in "Neighborhood Bauhaus."

The structures are also grid-like but the grid, appropriate to the Bauhaus watchword "form follows function," served as a framework on which residents of Ms. Bresnick's neighborhood, known as East Rock, hung photographs they had taken documenting the very un-Bauhaus houses built there between 1901 and 1910.

"Garden of Delight" was made for a dance called "Recycle/Cycle." The centerpiece of this work is large, vivacious pink flowers. A performance was scheduled June 21, the summer solstice. The dance will return on the winter solstice, too, when the flowers will be especially welcome.

An annual show that ends June 30, is Creative Arts Workshop's nationwide competition. Every year the workshop has a different and narrow focus. This year's theme is narrative, and the works are mostly paintings, drawings and photographs plus a couple of videotapes, a natural medium for narrative.

The show is titled, "Narration: Emblem and Sequence in Contemporary Art." The exhibition's strength is the responsibility it puts on the viewer to pick up or piece together the story.

Nataliya Bregel's "Argument" and "Father Sleeping" are essentially story boards rather meticulously charting these events Ms. Bregel manages to give the mundane occurrences a sense of genuine moment. The ordinariness of Kathryn Dunlevie's photographs with painted additions, "Around the Corner" and "Here and There," proclaims itself in the titles.

With Martin Gantman it's not so much the images of several classical figures that hold interest as much as the arcane markings that he has drawn on them; it's as if he is telling a hidden history of the world. Chris Cosnowski's style is deliberately crude: through a parade of characters he makes strong political statements on racism.

The grandest of the sequential stories, played out on several panels of charcoal drawing mounted on canvas, is "Lamentation" by Lynn Imperatore. It is a modern version of Jesus's crucifixion told with typically modern ambiguity. Ambiguity is a hallmark of many of the emblematic narratives. From the title alone, "Funeral for an Undertaker," the viewer knows he is in the land of paradox. Near a mound of dirt that is probably a filled grave, Julie Connick has painted a man in his underwear playing the violin.

A close inspection of an individual is the painting, "Wes at 19," by Eileen Eder. The painting is a portrait of a young man surrounded by the accouterments of someone about to leave his teens.

A paper dress with pictures of relatives printed on it is all that Colleen Coleman needs to invoke the sense of "When I Was Twelve." Scale makes Viviane Silvera's red chalk drawing "Dreaming" compelling. It's a leviathan portrait of a woman displayed on its side, and the unexpected orientation makes the features harder to interpret.