

NOT MANY SECRETS

The Lannan Foundation's first artist-in-residence cultivates informed mistakes.

BY DENNIS JARRETT

Paintings and
drawings by
Kate Shepherd

4-6 p. m.
Friday, March 5
Through May 21

Lannan
Foundation
313 Read St.
954-5148

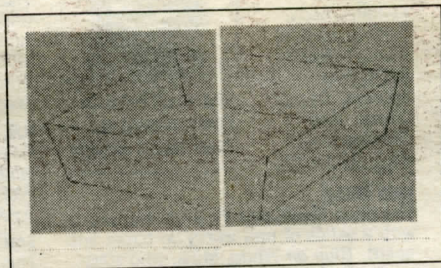
Artist talk by
Kate Shepherd

5-6 p.m.
Saturday,
March 6

SITE Santa Fe
1606 Paseo
de Peralta
954-5148

At a certain time of day it's easy to walk right past Kate Shepherd's "Wall Painting, Reflection of Opposing Entrance Door," because it has become what it represents. (When Shepherd first told me the title I heard it as "posing door," which also works nicely.) Fifteen minutes later it begins to accumulate its proper identity as a work of art and by the time the opposing glass door itself has faded into doorness the painting really starts to glow. Like Merlin's shadow, still stamped on the floor long after the wizard has blown out the candles and left the castle, it's a surrogate for the real thing. But in most of her remarkable work, there is no real thing apart from the painting or the drawing. It's easy to say that, but hard to keep yourself from finding in Shepherd's population of rectangles all sorts of resemblances to the natural world. She occasionally made such comparisons herself as we walked around the gallery adjacent to the luminous wall painting.

"Some of the work is complete," she said. "Some requires the viewer to do the work of completing it." Shepherd allows, even welcomes, silences to function in a conversation like words, so I waited to see what she meant. I stared at "Two Royal Blues, Arched Open Box"



KATE SHEPHERD. 'TRAY BOX ON VIBRANT RED + BLUE, LESS FRONT EDGE LINE,' 1998.

Differences in color are always slight." Most of her paintings and drawings show "boxes" — vertical, transparent ones, like an architect's plans for the wardrobe closet of a somewhat irregular person. The vertical line is often broken, continuing upward at a slightly different angle. And in several of the drawings, Shepherd has carefully befuddled the architecture.

"I enjoyed making mistakes in these drawings," she said, "that would negate the structure of the particular box." Her work is so fantastically deliberate that these are mistakes of a peculiar sort — intentional and even amusing. Wait a second; that line can't go there. Can it?

In front of a painting with "tomato reds" Shepherd used the word *emotion* and I knew she meant it in a special sense. Comparing these paintings to her "vastly different" work of three years ago, she said, "I wanted to make the paintings less personal, but still retain an emotional voice. By that I mean the relationships

of the colors and the lines.”

She showed me slides of portraits and figures from an earlier period and “vastly different” seemed an understatement — they were highly realistic — but her point, to the contrary, was that within the difference lay the same temperament. “My work is continuous. When I did figurative and landscape work it had that same focused . . .”

Precision?

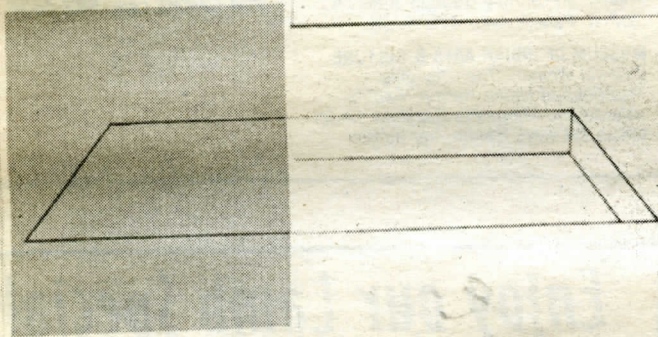
“No,” she said. Wrong word. “If you look at these slides you’ll see what I mean.

The similarities are in their compositional structure.” By now I was watching my vocabulary like a hawk. I tossed out an “artspeak” word knowing she’d have an off-kilter take on it.

You must hear the word *minimalism* a lot.

“Yes. I have to take responsibility for it. I can’t blame people for using that word, although I wouldn’t really use it myself. I use a graphic vocabulary with which I feel comfortable, one which is efficient and legible. Without extra stuff. It’s a reflection of my own sensibilities.”

“I don’t have many secrets behind these paintings,” she added. “They’re quite legible. I don’t think they elude the viewer.”



KATE SHEPHERD, 'ENDS SWAPPED, GREETING CARD ON TWO BLUES,' 1999.

and could complete what was in front of me only by imagining either a closet or a human figure.

“I’ve been thinking about Spanish standing portraits,” she said. “Some of these contain an arch, like a body.”

Shepherd, the first participant in the Lannan Foundation’s new artist-in-residence program, has created a group of paintings in the past five weeks that consist of pairs of wooden panels joined so that the seam is part of the image. As we walked around, she spoke in a warm, enthusiastic way, but her remarks were almost severely formal. “While the line colors are consistent,” she noted, “the surface color always varies from one to the other.