

Beneath surface at URI; juried show in Newport

New York painter Merle Temkin lives just a few blocks from Ground Zero. Yet even before Sept. 11, her roughly stained and sutured canvases signaled a survivor's resolve.

ART SCENE

Bill Van Sicken
Based on patterns derived from her own fingerprints, they use a variety of scraping, tearing and sewing techniques to evoke a sense of both vulnerability and resilience.

Temkin is one of five artists whose work is part of *Imprints, Punctures & Other Pointed Maneuverings*, at the URI Fine Arts Center Gallery in Kingston.

Organized by curator Judith Tolnick, the show examines efforts by contemporary artists to delve beneath the painted and sculpted surfaces of traditional art — literally and figuratively to get under art's skin.

For some, it's a chance to look at old materials from new angles.

Providence sculptor Jean Blackburn, for example, cuts up old pieces of furniture, then reassembles them in ways that turn outsides in and insides out. The results range from a reconfigured bed frame that now suggests a spindly treehouse to a deconstructed dresser that looks like a cross between a Cubist still life and a child's Lego set.

Another Rhode Islander,

Dave Cole, takes a familiar industrial product — the ubiquitous neon-orange electrical cord — and turns it into something cozily domestic. His *Electric Blanket* consists of more than 900 feet of cord, all neatly knitted together into a heavy-duty coverlet.

Other artists poke and puncture their work, thereby exposing hidden layers of color, space and texture.

New Yorker Fran Siegel's *Interference #12* consists of a layer of fine steel mesh suspended over a shiny plexiglass panel. By poking tiny holes through the mesh, Siegel is able to create delicate patterns that dance and shimmer as you move from side to side.

Temkin's paintings, on the other hand, suggest layers of flayed skin that have been roughly patched and sewn back together. And just in case you miss the skin-canvas connection, the paintings are covered with swirling abstract patterns based on Temkin's fingerprints.

Layers of a more traditional sort can be found in the work of Providence painter Irene Lawrence. In her *Motives for Writing* series, Lawrence covers both large and small canvases with dense thicket of paint, beginning with the lightest colors first and finishing with the darkest.

It's an old trick — the darker colors appear to float on the lighter hues — but Lawrence gives it a fresh twist by deftly alternating the color and density of the markings from pointing to



COLLECTOR, a 1998 wooden dresser with enamel paint, by Jean Blackburn, is part of an exhibit of contemporary painting and sculpture at the URI Kingston campus.

painting. Some suggest fluffy clouds, others rippling water, still others shimmering sky.

A FEW DOORS down from the Fine Arts Center Gallery, URI is hosting a small photography installation by Connecticut artist Jo Yarrington.

In *You are I and I am You*, Yarrington, who teaches at

Fairfield University, combines photographs of traditional church decorations with more contemporary images of figures and landscapes. In one pairing, a carving of Christ being whipped by a soldier hangs next to a picture of a naked figure crouching in a field. In another, a carving of Christ's entombment is paired with a picture of cupped hands.

Despite her unconventional approach, Yarrington clearly respects her sources. Indeed, *You are I and I am You* seems to be a genuine attempt to put a personal stamp on traditional Christian imagery.

(Note: More of Yarrington's work is on display in St. Augustine's Episcopal Church on the URI campus.)

Imprints, Punctures & Other Pointed Maneuverings runs through March 8 and *You are I and I am You* through March 6 at the Fine Arts Center, University of Rhode Island, Kingston. Hours are Tues.-Fri. noon-4 and 7:30-9:30 p.m. and Sat.-Sun. 1-4 p.m. Phone: 874-2775.

Meanwhile, in Newport

If it's February, it must be time for the Newport Art Museum's annual Members' Juried Exhibition.

This year's show, judged by RISD Museum curator Judith Tannenbaum, features works by nearly 100 artists, including paintings, sculptures, watercolors, photographs and furniture. It's also a testament to the many currents that make up the Newport art scene these days, with cutting-edge conceptual and mixed-media pieces rubbing elbows with watercolors of Bowen's Wharf and Newport Harbor.

Newport photographer Alexander Nesbitt, for example, earned Best of Show honors with a brooding, multi-panel photograph of an abandoned German steel mill. Stick that in your Topside!

Other award-winners include Frank Gasbarro (painting), Mary Dondoro (watercolor), Elizabeth Kethline (sculpture), Robert Rust (mixed media) and Al Ring (drawing).

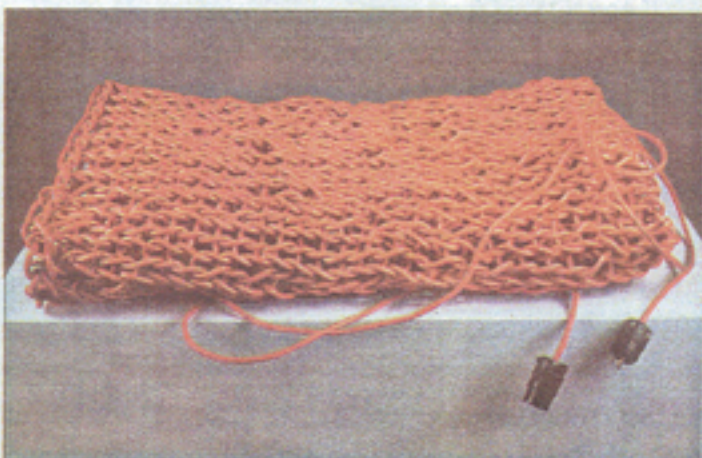
As it does every year, the museum is also hosting a one-person exhibit devoted to the work of last year's Best of Show winner. This year, it's Little Compton painter David Barnes.

Barnes is a talented artist with a clever gimmick: He paints seeds, pods, leaves, fruit and other small-scale objects at several times lifesize. The results suggest Renaissance murals (in a gallery note, Barnes admits to being a big Renaissance art fan) peopled not by saints and sinners, but by starfish, walnut shells and magnolia leaves.

Also on tap is *New Fictions: Constructed Photographs*, an exhibit of photocollages by Wakefield artist Darrell Matsumoto.

Like Barnes, Matsumoto, who teaches at Roger Williams University and the Rhode Island School of Design, is a study in contrasts. On the one hand, his work is a thoroughly contemporary hybrid of painting, printmaking, photography and collage. On the other hand, most of the show's recognizable images, including a toy blimp and a balsa wood glider, seem to refer back to the simple, low-tech pleasures of childhood.

15th Annual Members' Juried Exhibition runs through March 27. David Barnes: *New Paintings and Drawings* through April 3 and Darrell Matsumoto: *New Fictions: Constructed Photographs* through April 14. The Newport Art Museum is at 76 Bellevue Ave. Hours are Mon.-Sat. 10-4 and Sun. noon-4. Phone: 849-8200.



ELECTRIC BLANKET, a 1998 work by Dave Cole consisting of 900 feet of contractors' cords knitted to queen size, on exhibit at URI.