

Zeroing In On Springs

By Eric Ernst

While the East End as a whole has become practically synonymous with the artist community that has become an integral part of its persona, no one place is more closely associated with this band of aesthetic adventurers, unruly expressionists, and occasional, whimsical malcontents than the hamlet of Springs.

While this is undoubtedly due in part to the storied history of notable and iconic figures who moved there during the 1950s and 1960s, the Springs reputation among artists as the center of a truly remarkable creative community has maintained and continued to this day.

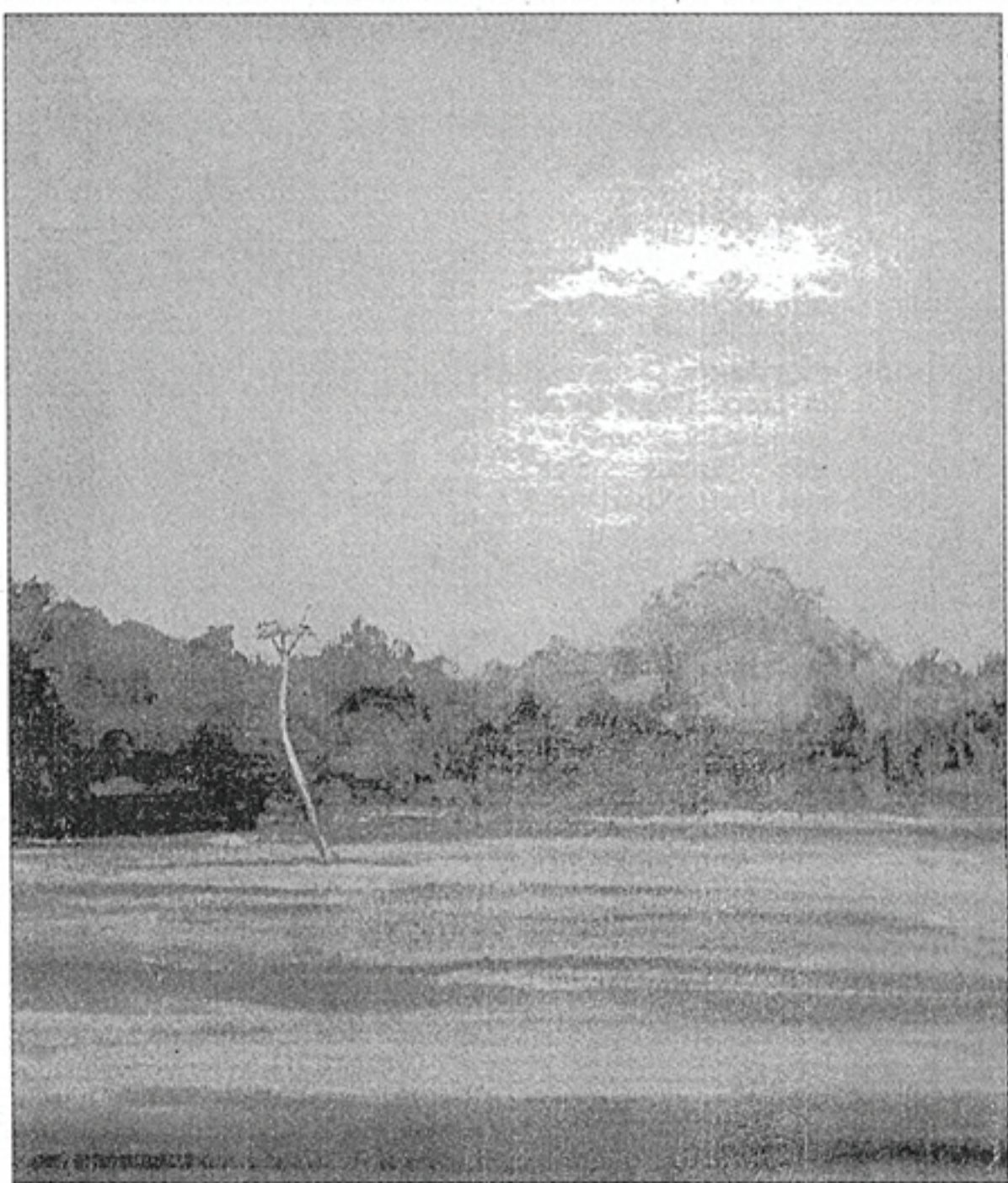
While exhibitions dealing with this phenomenon are usually only found on display at Ashawagh Hall, the Grand Palais of Springs, six local and notable Springs artists have offered themselves as sort of regional exports in an exhibit currently on display at the Muscovy Gallery in Bridgehampton.

As strange as it may seem for these denizens to wander so far from their familiar turf, in this context, displayed in a converted barn, there is a strange and compellingly rustic quality to the installation that is quite comfortable. While thankfully not quite replicating the bizarre idiosyncrasies of Ashawagh Hall, the curator was able to conjure an equally entertaining ambiance that is especially effective for this group of artists.

Of particular note is the new work by Bill Hofmann, who too rarely exhibits outside the rarified confines of Springs but whose paintings and drawings have always illustrated enviable draftsmanship abilities and delicate sense of rhythmic and tonal cadences.

In a series of acrylics on paper and canvas at Muscovy, the artist reflects a powerful understanding of the manner in which cacophonous rhythms can, by their own juxtaposition and placement, fuse together to create a surprisingly fluid arrangement.

This is particularly apparent in "Hurricane," in which the malevolent forces of nature threaten to break free of the constraints of the picture frame through sweeping and circular brushstrokes that just barely keep the composition under control. This is accentuated by Mr. Hoffman's assertive use of negative space, which underscores a dramatic feeling of depth and creates invisible planes



"Space for Rent" by Tim Tibus is on view at Muscovy Gallery.

that recede deep into the image.

Dennis Lawrence, by contrast, uses negative space as a tangibly physical component within his recent abstract works to almost completely flatten the picture plane. Working in a style that might be termed proto-pointillism, Mr. Lawrence virtually erases any distinctions between foreground and background and energizes the composition through geometric cadences that pulse with energy just beneath the surface of the picture plane.

In some of the works, such as "Meditation: Flicker" and "Meditation: Water," this effect is enhanced and accentuated by flowingly rhythmic forms floating like ghostly specters seemingly just beyond the point where they would become corporeal aspects of the composition itself. Instead, they seem almost apparitional, as if, were one to blink, they might disappear entirely from view.

Tim Tibus has developed over the past few years into one of the most accomplished plein air painters working today. Eschewing any overt romanticizing of nature's vistas, yet still managing to express an ineffable reverence for its majestic elegance in his manipulation of light and color, the artist has created works that are gently bucolic without being intellectually flaccid or superficially decorative.

PERSPECTIVES

Steve Loschen's work is memorable for his interplay of simple colors and playfully melodic forms and for the manner in which he is able to express these in both his paintings and sculptures. Evincing a reverence for Bauhaus principles of design by utilizing geometric imagery to reflect what has become an international language of form, his compositions constantly suggest an air of movement that is as determined as it is gently capricious.

Trish Franey's paintings and constructions, on the other hand, while overtly childlike in both their imagery and exuberance, are anything but gentle in their impact. Appearing at times as cartoonishly comical, the works nevertheless carry a discernable undertone of disquiet and occasional menace just beneath the surface.

For the most part, Ms. Franey's characters and images balance this impulse toward angst in their depiction as being perhaps slightly more zany than malevolent, as in "Radio Fred Head" or "The Simpletons." In "Toxic Veins," however, Ms. Franey abandons any sense of whimsy and instead offers a vision of disaffection and alienation that is nothing short of nightmarishly frightening.

Also exhibiting is an emerging artist by the name of Mica Invisible Marder, whose work is particularly engaging but whose familial relationship to the gallery owners poses some unfortunate issues of propriety.

Having said that, it is worth noting that Mr. Marder's work is powerful for its simplicity matched with an expressionistic approach to composition, line, and brushwork that is energetically charged. Eliciting tones of overt humor, as in "Chicken on the Run," he is also able to create images that are fraught with pathos and rich in character, as in "Old Dog".

The exhibition at Muscovy Gallery in Bridgehampton, "Artists of Springs," continues through January 9, 2005.