

Aebersold, Healy and Rappaports are

By WENDELL SEVERINGHAUS
"Old Friends," a new show at Bennington College, balances the past and present in a handful of intriguing ways.

Photographer Neil Rappaport and painter Susanne Rappaport document another era, and the past and character of a Vermont woman they never met, in delicate, hand-colored photographs of her home.

Ceramicist Jane Ford Aebersold shows four pieces of ceramic sculpture made between 1982 and 1986 that document a progression of shapes and surfaces. The pieces are all vessels. Similarly, her exuberant metallic sculpture of 1982 gives way to one with a quieter surface in 1986. The later vessel still coyly hints at the same metallic sheen, but only allows bits of it to show under an earthen solidness. Each piece, in a different way, is as elegant as the next as it plays with sculptural and surface ideas. Each rewards the viewer who takes the trouble to look at the back of each, with the subtle layers of bronze-like patina that change slightly with shifts in light.

Ancient technique

Aebersold, who uses gold and copper in her glazes, said the technique dates back to the birth of Christ, particularly in Persia.

She also has two adventuresome wall pieces from 1986, titled "From the Greenhouse." The works are comprised of four pieces each. Glaze over glaze makes a jungle of color where, in one of the works, the activity converges dramatically onto the image of fruit on a Matisse-blue plate.

Stanley Rosen adds another element to the show with two works in which a toy-sized alligator crawls

along a dry clay slope. It's a scene that is at once comical and primordial, for crawling along with the beast are sensuous, miniature seas of tendrils.

In a third work, Rosen's reddish clay sculpture, flowery and animal-like, literally climbs the wall.

Healy's work

The fourth "old friend" in the show is Sophia Healy. Her drawings on paper, dating from the 1960's and early 1970's, are evocative and expressive, with a pastoral vision pushing at the borders between figure and abstraction. As her brush and pencil describe the land,

(identified in one drawing as White Creek, N.Y.), fences, trees, and cows, she develops a kind of abbreviated symbolism.

At the heart of these peaceful works is economy of line and form, and a sense of the paper that is left empty. In one drawing the hand-made paper is as much a part of what is shown as the marks Healy makes on it.

The Rappaports' "Up Home at Minnie Griswold's," which stretches around a good portion of the gallery, dominates the show. It is subjective: a hymn about the past and a tribute to the woman, an exploration of the

spirit and personality of one person in a certain time and place — Pawlet.

It is also an objective piece of reportage, a careful look at some of the contents of a woman's house left untouched after her death. The curiosity and feelings of the photographer and painter, and their sense of who Minnie Griswold might have been, are apparent in each photograph, from the lace-covers of old chairs in a parlor to an open bible with the phrases Minnie Griswold found important enough to underline.

There are photographs of photographs of family scenes; there are collages of clippings of the day's

Old Friends'

newspapers. Receipts, the "Andes wood parlor stove," a woman's sewing things from an earlier era, an organ and songbooks of the day, carry the narrative. These ordinary things of the past, ending with the striking last photograph of a room with a door through which we see the greater world beyond her home, make up the Rappaports' mental image of the woman, which in the end is a tribute to her and her son.

Spirit world

The written portion of their story about how they came to make the series of photographs begins, "How does one write about a journey of the

imagination, about time travel, about the spirit world?" The photographs themselves answer that question. Using a visual vocabulary, they tell a story that is as much about imagination and the nature of inquiry into the past and into character as it is about the woman.

The show, organized by the artists' themeselves who, with the exception of Susanne Rappaport, teach at the college or have taught there together, opened April 15. It will run through May 15 at the Suzanne Lemberg Usdan Gallery at Bennington College. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday, 1-5 p.m.