

Faculty works featured in art exhibit

By ELIZABETH ABBOTT

The art exhibit that opened last week at the Usdan Gallery, titled "Works by Bennington Faculty," on the Bennington College campus is more a showing than a show; there is no theme to it, no one artist is featured, rather it is five little shows in one.

"It is a group show put together by

the faculty working together," explained Graham Shane, professor of architecture at Bennington College who organized one section of the show.

Of the five displays, three have the same purpose of enabling faculty members who have not recently shown their work to show it. But the other two sections are completely unrelated; one is the display of photographs by four photojournalists, the other is the exhibition of architectural designs by two top national firms.

The lack of unity of this exhibit is disconcerting at first, prompting questions like what are the designs for Chinatown in Boston, Mass., and a ski village in Stratton doing here? But, once one realizes that each section stands alone, the diversity becomes more interesting than awkward.

As always, some works are more stimulating than others. Of particular note are the 14 black and white photographs selected from Bennington College's collection.

One wonders what other gems the Bennington collection harbors when you see these photographs by Robert Doisneau, Eliot Erwitt, Alen Mac-Weeney and Garry Winograd. Not all photojournalism lives up to the cliché it exemplifies — that a "picture is worth more than a thousand words." These images, glimpses of life in other countries calling to mind other times, do.

Has it only been 11 years since the women's movement was born, taking its first steps with demonstrations in

cities nationwide? Garry Winograd's 1971 photograph of such a demonstration in New York City reminds us that it was so.

So also, a photograph taken by Erwitt of the change of the imperial guard in Tehran during the late Shah's rule, reminds us that less than three years ago, a monarchy ruled where Islamic fundamentalists now govern. How soon we forget the past.

To go from these photographs to a series of hand-made paper works by Sophia Healy, a Bennington College professor, is a little like going from life to art. Healy focuses almost single-mindedly on color. In fact, she said she uses the same, simple design in each work in the series — a diamond shape comprised of bands of pastel shades — to emphasize the color.

"The image is just to serve the color," she said. "Color is the most important consideration for me."

And her color choice is elegant in each of the ten works. But, because color is the only variable, ten is too many for this series however lovely they may be. More appropriate in number are the pieces of pottery displayed by faculty assistants Barry Bartlett and Bob Green.

Delicate shapes, smooth surfaces and natural colors mark Green's work. In fact, judging from the precise shape of his globes and platters, Green pays much of his attention to shape.

Bartlett's pottery, by contrast, seem to exist as a surface for his painted designs as much as for the shape of the containers themselves. His designs, painted on large, shallow platters, suggest primitive symbols. The impression of primitivism is reinforced by three urn-like containers; one of them, placed in the center of 12 heavy black tiles, drums up the image of an ancient altar of sacrifice.

Next to the photographs, pottery, and paper works, the architectural designs are indeed perplexing. They are finely drawn and Shane said that was one reason he selected them for the show. The other reason for including them was, simply, for the benefit of his architecture class, he said.

This show at the Usdan is not the greatest but it is a pleasant way to spend an afternoon. The Usdan Gallery is open from 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Admission is free.


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