

# NEW ART examiner

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS  
MARCH 1990



SHEILA FINNIGAN, "Study for the Deposition" (central panel), mixed media on paper, 30" x 40". Photo by Michael Tropea.

## Sheila Finnigan

ARC Gallery  
1040 W. Huron St., 312/733-2787

A work in progress exhibit is a challenge for the spectator in that it lays bare the rudiments of the creative process: ideation, experimentation, and possible content and formal resolutions. Local figurative painter Sheila Finnigan's "Studies for the Deposition" exhibit allowed us access to that process.

Continuing her concern with "historically significant" spiritual events reconsidered in a contemporary context, Finnigan is preparing for a large painting combining several pieces from this show. *The Last Supper: Double Cross* (oil on masonite, 72" x 216") which ironically appears on the announcement card but not in the show, reveals how the present studies may culminate. Featured on WGN-TV's "Heart of Chicago" *The Last Supper* is composed of five alternately horizontal and vertical panels in which Finnigan rayed bright color over contour line black-and-white figures. This piece burgeons with a more mature style. Prior exhibits of Finnigan's work demonstrated a strong influence of Edvard Munch and Van Gogh. While their presence is still felt in her use of heavy emotional content, strong gestural rendering, and bold form, her experimentation with color, figure-ground relationships, and her intentional coupling of paintings has opened up new avenues in the work.

Finnigan, who deftly employs black ink and tempera on paper, paired sets of the same subject in this exhibit as alternatives to test expressive effectiveness. Thus in *Simon I*, a portrait of a scarred and goggled war figure, she uses color with a cracked surface; in *Simon II* white predominates and the mood shifts dramatically. In *A.D. I* a close-

up of the deposed Christ is black and white with a green banner as accent; while in *A.D. II* a full spectrum of color covers the same figure.

The combination of classical religious figures with contemporary touches which characterizes Finnigan's work puts the viewer in a pluralistic atmosphere where time and place have no significance. This is most convincing in her central panel for *The Deposition*. It is a repository for four of the 15 pieces exhibited. Christ is portrayed holding a banner with the insignia N.u.N, meaning *Nacht und Nebel*, night and fog, the Nazi sign for the Jewish death sentence. (INRI could have been selected but universal suffering carries many banners.) Mary supports the deposed figure as does a goggled pilot. On the left is a quaint individual wearing a watch, boogying, blowing bubblegum, and nonchalantly supporting Christ. A boy to the right nestles a book on quantum physics under his arm. The idea of chance elements which the theory proposes is enacted most effectively in Finnigan's *Holy Ghosts and Animus*. Three hollow-eyed ghosts anxiously gaze on as a juggler chaotically plays with their destinies. Finnigan's couplings mesmerize us, and we inadvertently turn our cheek for another slap.

In a written statement of intent, Finnigan says, "In focusing the viewer on the 'animus,' destruction, I hope to leave the viewer with the recourse, 'anima,' creation." "Studies for a Deposition" works successfully on a visual and emotive level while jarring our cerebral and spiritual sensibilities. The piece completed from Finnigan's "Studies" may have the viewer wonder, as Oppenheimer did on witnessing the first A-bomb explode, "What have we done?"

Price range: \$1,100 to \$2,800.

Valerie Burke