

ARTWEEK

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ALAN SARET'S VISIONARY DRAWINGS

by Suzanne Muchnic

Alan Saret is a visionary artist whose dreams of cosmic and terrestrial harmony are tinged with mysticism, optimism, and imaginative delight. He explores architecture, landscape and energy systems in sculpture and drawings that seem to transport viewers to an appealing otherworld of joyful contemplation and reverential retreat.

Saret, New York artist who has scant attention from the press and rarely shows his work on the west coast, is best known for architecture-related sculpture, usually constructed of wire. His "Ghosthouse," an ethereal cone or mound-shaped structure of steel fencing and sheet plastic, was shown at Artpark in 1975. A few photographs of "Ghosthouse" and about thirty drawings of visionary scenes and energy fields, dated 1968-75, are on view at UC Irvine, through September 30.

The work is a visual feast of bright colors, airy compositions and expressive line. Some members of Saret's 'families' of drawings appear simple and childlike. "Two Whales, Four Whales" from the "Balancer, Beasts and Great Beings Family," for instance, is a splashy bit of whimsy that features a pair of smiling green whales bouncing above four triangles of water. "Planet and Ocean Family" works are bright watercolors that explore such unlikely possibilities as a "Green Planet Splitting into a New Age" above a mountainous landscape.

Two "Fire Planets," one inhaling, the other exhaling, are puffs of brilliant color that effectively contrast inner and outer-directed energy. Another pair of Planetary Body drawings explores expansion and contraction in contained and dispersed landscapes. Saret's imaginary universe is an active, pulsating place. Drawings that appear to be tossed off impetuously from a child's brush are full of expressive energy and fanciful ideals.

Saret explores a "Water System" and a "Wave System" in abstractions of directed movement, while works like "Waters of Paradise" spell out details of an idyllic scene, complete with a sunbather stretched out on the beach. A group of colored pencil works moves into more polished figurative drawing and complex composition. In the "Great Stair Place" lithe bodies ascend a staircase suspended in a landscape of lush vegetation. Forms are precisely defined, while circumstances are mysterious.

The artist, who has a degree in architecture and has studied with Paolo Soleri, often deals with architectural fantasies. "Flying Peanut: Concept of a Large, Hollow, Slow-Flying, Cushion-Lined Enclosure, Less Concerned with Transportation than an Enjoyable Way of Being" reveals a concern with freedom from earthbound structures. "Seven-Sun Aery Living House is made of flexible, light-transmitting fabric to

employ “harmonious amplification of natural systems.”

Saret is by no means partial to space-age solutions. His “Planet and Castle Mountain” has fairytale castles perched on yellow, orange, and green peaks. “Vine Castle” appears to be inspired by traditional jungle dwellings.

“Gang Drawings” offer a change of pace and establish Saret as a sophisticate capable of communication through abstraction and delicate nuance. Clusters of colored pencil lines on vast white space capture a variety of moods and suggest seasons, times of day and spiritual concerns.

In “Trace Series” flecks of color enliven bundles of agitated graphite line. Here, the relationship between Saret’s drawings and sculpture is clear. Drawn line becomes wire structure, now bound together by visual implication, not physical restraint. In other ink landscapes, line appears knotted in a continuous network that expands and contracts like flexible chicken wire.

Saret’s romanticism, apparent in most of his drawings, is worked out through self-styled mysticism and a creative search for peaceful modes of life.