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Benny Andrews Discovers Xerox

By STEPHANIE BELL

Openings are often just cocktail parties where the work serves as a charming, but incidental backdrop. It is quite unusual to attend one where the artist's work can overcome the vibrant chatter of two hundred milling contemporaries. Benny Andrews can boast of such an exhibition currently at the Leonard-Heller Galleries, 789 Madison Ave.

Basically a collage painter in the same tradition as Romare Bearden, Andrews contributes his own elements to the established milieu. The latest of his innovations is the use of color Xerox reproductions as part of his collage material.

He has joined with the Xerox corporation in this venture and for his 'Utopia Series' has used the Xerox machine to produce an artistic perception of color and form.

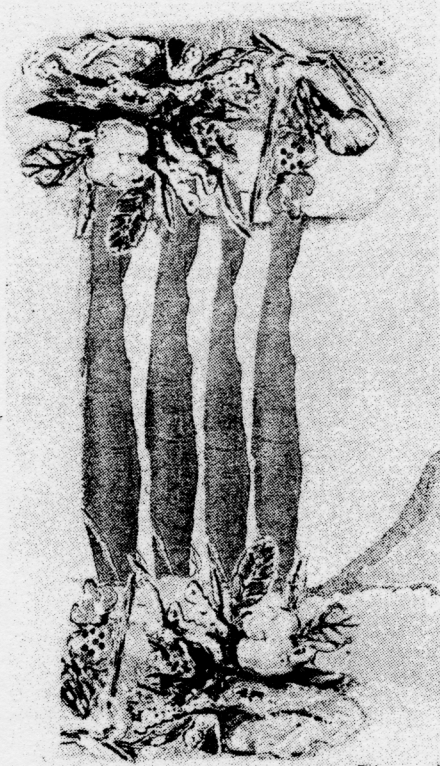
I would call this experiment a mighty success. The work never looks "photographic" and yet, from within the limitation of the machine, Andrews has forged a dynamic series of realistic images.

The show consists of about thirty pieces — most of them studies for his "Utopia," the sixth of a yearly series of monumental paintings which make political statements.

A collage entitled "From Home" (1975) is among my favorites in the show. Here the figure of a man is subtly related to other more abstract images. The blending of the abstract and the real is another Benny Andrews trademark. "From Home" also contains the combination of repetition of motif and the use of color that set up visual rules for the viewer which make his comprehension less of a task.

These rules are subconscious and are part of the secret of the great art of Africa.

"Quartet" is another favorite. Here again the repetition of motif lends coherence and character to the piece. For those of us familiar with Andrews' other series, namely, Symbols (1971), Trash (1972), Circles (1973), Sexism (1974) and his war series (1975), 'Utopia', is a must see as further explanation of Andrews' artistic idiom.



"QUARTET."

Dazzling Combo

His fine combination of technique and spirit is dazzling. Indeed, a mature artist of increasing prominence, he combines the spirit of Black awareness with that of an accomplished artist/craftsman.

It is rare among the Black artists that we see such polished technique. Too often the message seems more important than the medium. Andrews has struck a fine balance between the two.

In that way, Andrews has succeeded in transcending another barrier for the Black American artist. That is — although his statements are politically and socially motivated, he makes them completely within the boundaries of the artform. His works speak the language of art as well as the language of Black People.

Andrews' advice to the young artist is "Work, Work, Work!" — If 'Utopia' is any indication of where that philosophy leads — we should all take heed.

Stephanie Bell, a graduate of Cornell University, has exhibited her work at the Church of the Intercession, the New York Cultural Center and other group shows. She is a freelance commercial artist.