

Duchamp at the Rodeo

I'm originally from the Midwest, so I admit that the nuances of a Western state are foreign to me. Take the rodeo, for instance. Cowboy culture, with its skin-tight Wranglers, boots and hats, has not yet enchanted my Michigan mind. The fascination with "Cowboy Art" in this region is beyond me; but when someone comes along with a new twist on that theme, I take a second look.

The artist who changed my idea of rodeo-and-cowboy art is Lorin Humphreys, whose pieces at the Basement Gallery (on display through February) are not typical Western art, particularly the main pieces in the show. These large oils first caught my attention because of their active forms and abstract shapes.

I enjoyed the compositions and forms from the first look. I studied the pieces before I read the titles, then the abstracted images took on new meaning. This "Bullrider" series suddenly showed the bucking gyrations of a bull and rider. Mostly the forms are abstracted representations, but there are scattered details throughout the pieces that reveal the subject matter.

Humphreys' work is related to later Cubism in many ways. The artist with the clearest connection would be the pre-Dada Duchamp. These pieces have the same active shapes and lines and monochromatic coloring as Duchamp's famous *Nude Descending a Staircase*. These compositions are much more chaotic, but they also reveal a similar idea of movement through space and time.

Bullrider and the Parallel Line of Addiction is one of the most colorful works. The soft blues and peachy-oranges suggest the ride, with the bull's horns and the rider's gripping hand evident. The composition is balanced by parallel lines of vibrant orange and neon green. This has none of the trappings of the traditional Western-themed art that we have come to expect with "Cowboy Art."

One piece that does fit the theme, but in a different way, has a charm all its own. *Boy in White Hat* portrays a pale 11-year-old in a large cowboy hat and loose tank top. His gaze is fixed on the viewer as he stiffly stands before us. Inverted, coming from the top of the piece, is the image of a woman. She balances the boy compositionally, but she is hazy and somewhat like a fairy tale princess. She watches him as he watches us. Is this indicative of the draw and romance of the rodeo?

Regardless of subject matter, and even composition, the painting quality itself is wonderful in this show.



Photo by Brad Talbott

Painter Lorin Humphreys at the Basement Gallery. His body of work concerns the traditional West—by way of the avant-garde.

Those interested in abstract forms find a new way of getting there.

Those interested in the "ride" will

—Tyrus Clutter