

Gottlieb uses form and color on untitled, unique paintings in order to evoke emotions

art

REVIEW

By Garth Lienemann
Staff Reporter

Renowned American artist Adolph Gottlieb developed all of his paintings by working in series. This approach creates a definite theme in his "Monotypes" collection, on display at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery through April 12.

Gottlieb often called the canvas he worked on "the painter's rectangle." From this rectangle he would manipulate color and form to evoke a response from the viewer.

In his 50-year career as an artist, Gottlieb experimented with form and simplicity and utilized basic themes. He had no idea what kind of response he would get from his paintings, but he noticed that a few minor changes in any given painting could elicit different responses.

Gottlieb, who died in 1974, had a stroke in 1970 that paralyzed one arm and made using a wheelchair a necessity. Because of this drastic lifestyle change, he needed to use a new system of painting. He hired assistants to help him move his painting surface so he could reach the area he wished to work on.

Daphne Deeds, curator of the gallery, said the difference between a painting and a monotype is the way it is developed. A painting is a work of art which uses acrylic directly applied to a designated surface. A monotype, however, is made from pressing a piece of paper onto a glass, steel or cardboard surface that had been freshly painted.

"It's a unique print," she said.

All of Gottlieb's monotypes were printed in 1973 and 1974. His last two monotypes, which also were his largest, were completed two weeks before his death.

Two recurring elements in Gottlieb's monotypes are a horizontal line dividing the paper in

half, and a circular shape, usually positioned in the upper half of the paper. Although the colors and sizes of the circles vary, most of them are interpreted by viewers as the sun.

Other ideas about the circles include the Buddhist concept of yin and yang or a manifestation of sexual tension and release. It is difficult to determine Gottlieb's actual meaning — or if he even had one — because all of his works are untitled.

An untitled painting, Deeds said, is "very typical of Gottlieb's era and generation. It is indicative of an abstract impressionist."

The display at Sheldon is strategically arranged to allow the viewer maximum appreciation of Gottlieb's theme. A monotype will be positioned on one wall of the display, with its counterpart on another wall.

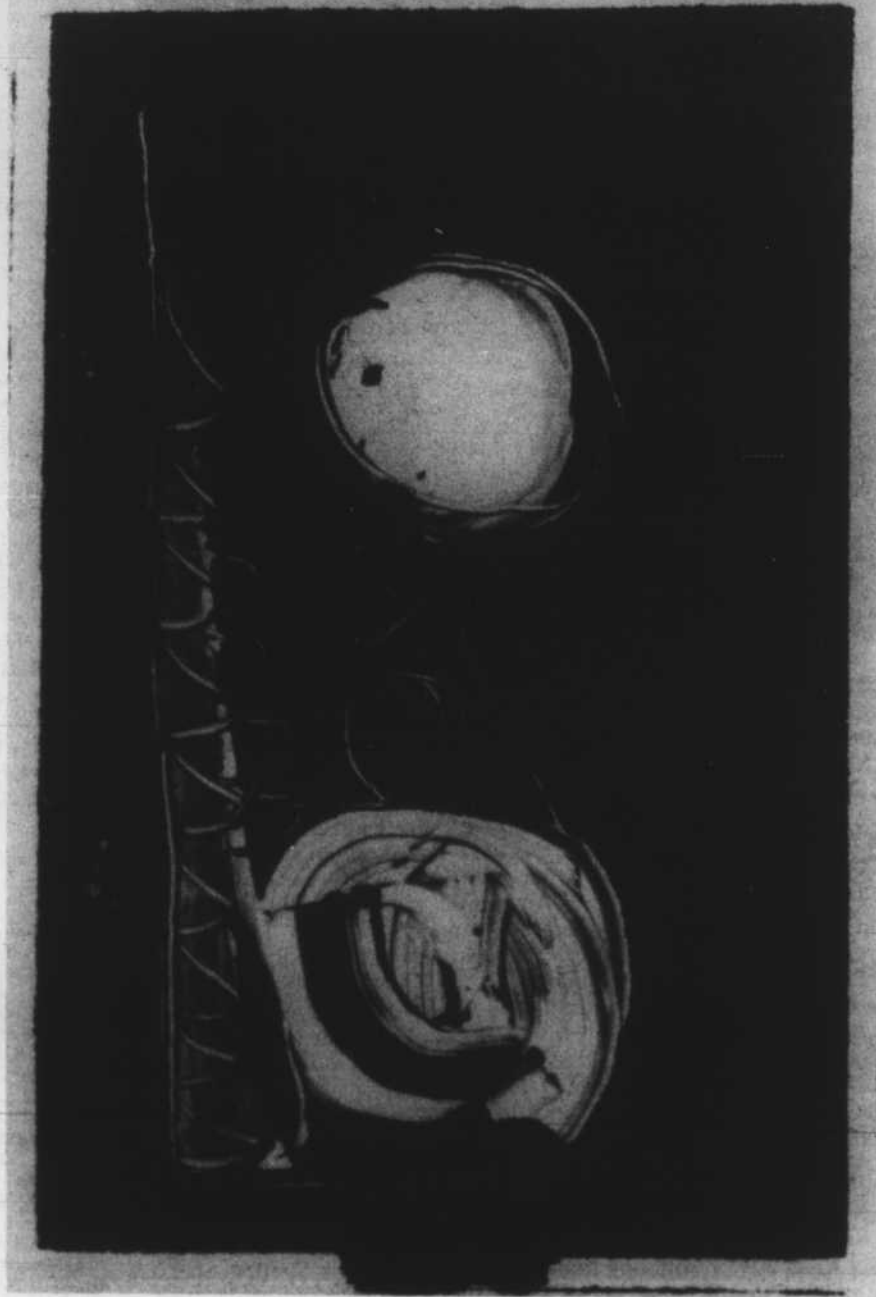
The first painting will capture the viewer's attention with its clear-cut definition. The other will be a repeat of the first painting but it will appear different because it seems to be breaking apart.

Often cited as a forerunner of minimalism, Gottlieb stretches the imagination with only a few ovals, splotches or "S" curves. The fascinating aspect of his abstractness is that many of his monotypes include the same shapes, with only lighter or darker shades, sloppier or neater execution, and defined areas of control or freedom.

One of the walls of the display is dedicated to Gottlieb's "dark" monotypes. These five or six paintings have black backgrounds, with color added on top. These monotypes also are different because Gottlieb used small pieces of cardboard or his fingers to scrape paint or ink off the surface. This process gives this section of the display added character.

Gottlieb's work is represented in collections in virtually every major museum in the United States, as well as many private and public collections in the United States, Europe and Japan.

Admission to the gallery is free.



Courtesy of the Adolph & Esther Gottlieb Foundation, Inc.

Fine line divides pornographic, erotic works



By Bryan Peterson
Staff Reporter

I have two magazines in front of me. One is the April 1992 issue of Playboy — the "Girls of the Big Eight" issue. The other is the winter/spring issue of Yellow Silk, a "Journal of Erotic Arts."

One costs \$5 and has 180 pages; the other is more expensive and much shorter. The second came in the mail, while the first was purchased at a local convenience shop.

I find each of them appealing and intriguing, and the people pictured in both are attractive. Moreover, rewarding reading material is to be found in each magazine.

One, however, is called "pornographic," while the other is called "erotic." Each is victim to the particular perceptions and associations that go with its respective label.

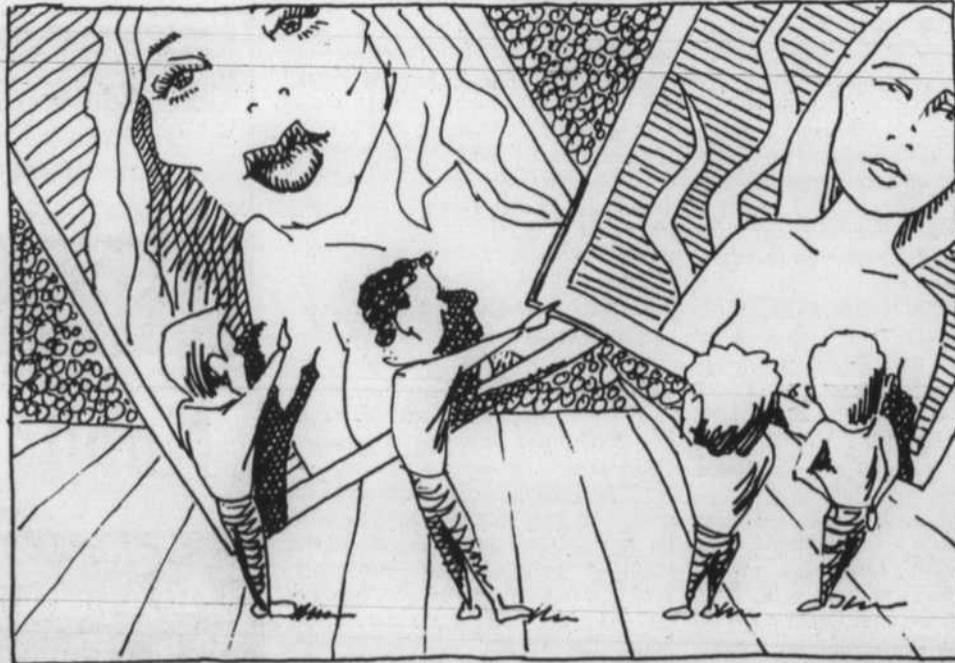
While to some minds the pornographic and the erotic are worlds apart — one accepted, the other condemned — the two seem not too distant to me. There are, of course, those who would label both as trash, but such a view is not of interest here.

Leaving aside such truly objectionable subjects as child pornography and snuff films, I would like to examine some of the similarities and differences between these two magazines and the fields they represent.

I know, never judge a book by its cover, but that is exactly what people look at in the case of magazines, at least initially.

The Playboy cover is glossy and lurid, showing some of what is to come to a reader who already knows what to expect.

Yellow Silk's cover is done in softer tones. A nude woman is on the cover, but one does not know whether to look at the body or the thick-ket-like bird's nest atop her partially shaven head.



David Badders/DN

From the front, we jump into the middle of things. Playboy offers a centerfold with "Playmate Data" written in a childish hand and with little to say of any substance.

Yellow Silk features a pull-out section with only one exposed breast. The journal's advertising has been confined to this section so that readers are not distracted by the ads.

While we are there, let us examine those ads. In Yellow Silk, there are books, magazines and "sensual products" only. Playboy, which has a much higher percentage of advertising, fills its pages with ads for tobacco and alcohol for the most part.

But these are all secondary. The main question in this comparison is whether any substantial difference exists between what is called pornography and what is called erotica.

These two categories cannot be wholly separated, but some generalizations can be made based upon these two magazines, which will be taken as roughly representing larger categories.

A basic division can be made between the

sexual and sensual, although there is again a great range where the two overlap. There is no blanket statement to be made, such as, "Well, if it leads to sexual stimulation and/or orgasm, it is sexual/pornographic" or "The erotic is what pleases without appealing to prurient interests."

What is sexual can be sensual and vice versa, but not all things sexual are sensual (or, again, the reverse). Things get even more complicated upon observing that these distinctions and blurrings vary widely among individuals.

Playboy seems to be oriented more toward the strictly sexual, though its words and images can also be sensual. Some fine fiction (William Kennedy this month) and revealing interviews (Jonathon Kozol) can be found in its pages.

Unfortunately, the most challenging ideas are overshadowed by such backward ideas as a cartoon about knowing when you "don't have to buy a woman any more drinks."

The criticisms also are familiar: Pornography degrades women (and men??), reduces women (and men??) to mere objects and gives

a distorted, incomplete view of sexuality. These criticisms are valid, but not as global condemnations. Such things can and do occur, but not in all cases.

Much of the justification for the legitimacy of erotica is that it does not exist solely for sexual gratification and that it presents a fuller, healthier portrayal of sexuality. These things also are true — but not in all cases.

There is sexuality and sensuality in Yellow Silk, but it is more "artistic" and "literary" than that in Playboy; there are more than blatant photos. Yellow Silk also presents substantial literary offerings, such as poetry, fiction, and reviews by the likes of Louise Erdrich, Ntozake Shange and Jerry Bumpus in this issue alone.

Things do seem to be more subtle and challenging, sometimes even disturbing, in Yellow Silk's pictures and words alike. In Playboy, things are straightforward: Here is a naked woman in an alluring pose without a partner. She is inevitably wearing lingerie and makeup, possibly even high heels.

In Yellow Silk, we find photos of men and women, all of them more natural in appearance and pictured both alone and together. Surprise! Skin can be wrinkly, and both breasts and penises can be small.

This particular issue of Yellow Silk does some amazing things with androgyny, pairing men and women who look remarkably similar at first glance. All of this is in marked contrast to the small set of stylized photos that appear in every issue of Playboy.

Here, then, is one key distinction in the visual realm: No matter how many times you come back to Playboy, you are looking at glamorized, naked flesh. Yellow Silk offers something different — subtle discoveries with each return. Moreover, Yellow Silk's words tend to complement and enhance the photographs it contains.

Some general distinctions between Playboy and Yellow Silk (and, more generally, pornography and erotica) can be made, yet the two cannot be wholly separated.

A person will generally find whatever he/she is looking for, and will be interested, excited, or aroused by whatever fits his/her tastes. Ultimately, a person will find satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with whatever lies at hand.