

# At Angels Gate, 4 artists take their cue from Mother Nature

By Peter Frank  
Special to the Press-Telegram

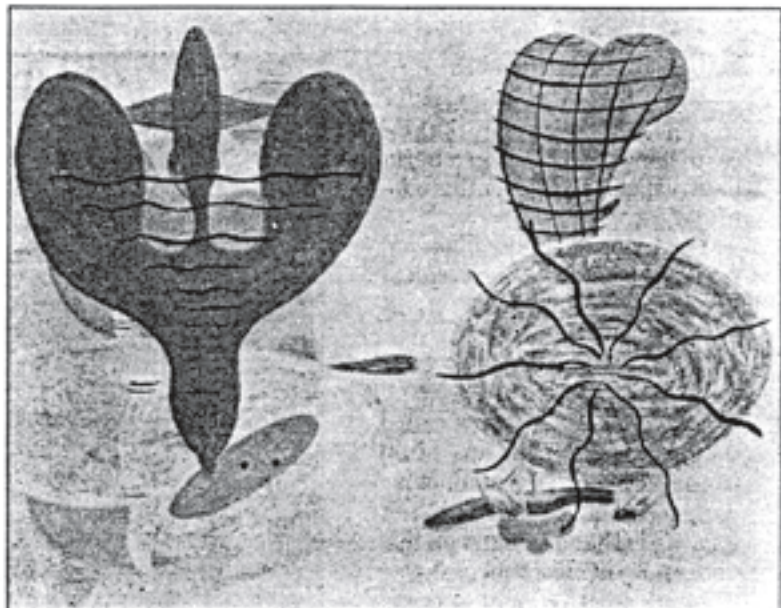
The local talents gathered under the title "Four Artists By Nature" appear strikingly dissimilar. To a casual viewer, the only characteristic the works at the Angels Gate Cultural Center share is that they all hang on the wall. But look more closely: The curvaceous shapes of Hilary Baker's small gouaches and mono-prints recur in the expansive painting-drawings of Marianne Salties, whose dark tendrils resemble the stems of the plants in Miki Warner's photographs, which themselves echo the chunky trees in William Leidenthal's oil-and-tar-painted wood collages.

This isn't a show of ecological documents, or even conventional landscapes. These artists get under the skin of nature. They get a buzz off the basic forms and forces in the natural world.

Leidenthal comes closest to producing standard views of nature. His landscapes, however, are anything but standard. They seem, at first, raw, clumsy ciphers for trees, mountains, lakes and other landscape elements that are plopped together almost arbitrarily. These little boards are plug-ugly. But they are endearing in their ugliness and, finally, very convincing in their near-childlike forthrightness.

Leidenthal is commenting on the fragility of nature and its gradual erosion. It may not always be pretty, he seems to be saying, but it's the only world we got.

Warner approaches nature as a source of endlessly varying form. Ironically, she explores this variety by confining it to a strict format. She plucks eye-catching plants, sets them all down on the same backing frame, photographs them with the same pinhole cam-



"Lagniappe": In her gouaches on paper, Hilary Baker chooses a curvaceous vocabulary to convey the drama of the 1950s.

era, and develops them all into 4-by-5-inch images printed on 8-by-10-inch paper. The cookie-cutter approach could be dull as dishwater, but it turns the assorted leaves, stems and seed cases into a veritable vocabulary of forms, silhouetted in black and white with the sensuous burr the pinhole camera provides.

The small scale to which Baker confines her painting is appropriate. Baker's shapes may be extravagant in their variety and luminous color, but they all suggest microscopic organisms. They could be bacteria, plankton or any of a billion eesy beings. With her loopy, ovoid forms and fanciful organisms, she seeks to evoke the spirit of the known world.

To judge from the titles, the people and events Baker conjures are rooted in the 1950s. She is

clearly smitten with the drama and glamour of that period. Her choice of a curvaceous formal vocabulary, as well as a sweetly acidic palette, does the Eisenhower years justice.

Like the dual nature of Baker's work, Salties's images carry dank and abrasive qualities, as well as a boisterous, infectious energy. Working from an abstracted notion of natural form, she seeks to embody the life force directly in her forms. Indeed, while her three "By Nature" comrades make or take pictures of things, Salties invents things in her large combinations of painting, drawing and lithography.

As good as the other three artists are, Salties is the real discovery here. According to her resume, this is her first show in the Los Angeles area. In fact, it

## ART REVIEW

- What: "Four Artists By Nature."
- Where: Angels Gate Cultural Center, 3601 S. Gaffey St., Building A, San Pedro.
- When: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday. Through May 28.
- More info: (310) 519-0936.

seems to be her first show outside San Diego, where she lives, and Mexico City, where she was educated. Hopefully, her work will continue to head north.

*Peter Frank is a Los Angeles free-lance critic.*