

CAROL SING

Here yinz come a was-sailin' along the Dawntown streets. Tonight at 7 you can join your fellow Pittsburghers (and some local choirs) for the WPXI-TV Carol Sing in front of Lazarus Downtown. Love and joy 'n'at.'

PSO FIDDLES

"Home Is Where the Music Is" is the theme of today's Pittsburgh Symphony Fiddlesticks Family Concert at 11:15 a.m. at Heinz Hall, Downtown. Tickets, \$14-\$17; 412-392-4900. Doors open and Discovery Time pre-concert activities begin at 10 a.m.

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: FILMS, TV, STAGE, DANCE, BOOKS, ARCHITECTURE

Artists make their own reality in digital realism

By Mary Thomas
Post-Gazette Art Critic

In "For Real: Realism in the Digital Age," Wood Street Galleries has another winning, edgy, sometimes-wish-you-hadn't-looked-but-at-the-same-time-you-want-more exhibition.

Following shows like "Moving Images (Portraits)" and "Naked: The Naked Body in Contemporary Video, Photography and Performance," gallery curator Murray Horne has gathered another group of artists who provoke, challenge and titillate, here through the unexpected scenarios — visual and mental — of their altered works.

The show's title suggests manipulation — and that's applicable to the technique used — but many of the visuals are too strange to attempt duplicity.

However, the work that has the most matter-of-fact appearance is the trickiest, and the one that prompted Horne to organize the exhibition. New Yorker Timothy Hutchings' excellent "The Arsenal at Danzig and Other Views," completed in 2001, has the worn look of an old film, a perception enhanced by the background sound of a running movie projector. But it's a video.

In it, a man walks past — even inside — European "architectural masterpieces." But they were all destroyed in World War II.

Hutchings, inspired by a book on the subject, donned period dress and, using digital software, cunningly inserted himself and other moving beings within the spaces of photographs of the buildings. The emotion inspired is one of longing, a nostalgia in step with the aesthetic look of the work itself.

Also obscure is the manipulation employed by Amir Zaki of Los Angeles in what appear to be city night scenes, but with skewed perspectives and relationships that offer no anchor to the viewer.

In contrast, Canadian Euan Macdonald's approach is obvious. In four short videos an everyday subject takes a fanciful or humorous turn, as in "Hammock Sleep" when the peaceful sway the occupant is enjoying becomes a harrowing series of 360-degree loops.

There is no humor in the dark and disturbing photographs of Dutch artist Margi Geerlinks, which resonate in the mind long after leaving their presence. A young girl, naked except for her white cotton panties and lipstick, holds a faux woman's breast to her chest, the latter tethered in the viewer's space by a thread from the crochet work that embellishes it.

Whether Geerlinks is talking about culture's breast worship and its effect on children, to a predatory loss of innocence or to something else again, the impact is powerful. As is that of her "Gepetto" series, depicting a young boy and a gray-haired man who could be creator or pedophile.

That said, the piece that dominates the exhibition — because of its familiar but amplified sound, evocative colored imagery of rising and falling orifice-dotted flesh, and the fact that to best experience it the visitor ascends three steps to stand on a vibrating black floor — is "Breathing Room," a video installation by Patricia Piccinini.

Australian Piccinini, who exhibited in recent Sidney and Liverpool Biennials and is showing for the first time in the United States in Pittsburgh, is also represented by a number of photographs that feature a curious naked and furless small animal that's both repelling and vulnerable,



"Social Studies," a digitally altered photograph by Australian artist Patricia Piccinini, is one of the works in "For Real: Realism in the Digital Age" at the Wood Street Galleries, Downtown.

ART REVIEW

a fetal-like amalgam of human, rodent and marsupial. In one fairly straightforward series, it appears amidst curious, happy children who aren't put off by its odd appearance.

Its role in the admirable, four-part "Science Story," set in a science lab, is significantly escalated. As the living subject of a research project, it presents a dilemma to the white-coated man and woman who prep it for some procedure on a stainless steel table.

The expressive actors perfectly convey the ethical concerns and non-verbalized hesitations they may feel about their work, but they proceed nonetheless. Or, "Science Story" could be an allegorical representation of the couple's family planning discussions.

In any event, the work is fascinating and engaging.

The gallery initiated an ongoing series of happy hours called Full Frontal Friday last night. Featuring music, hors d'oeuvres and art, they'll coincide in the future with the Penn Avenue Arts galleries' First Fridays events, and will be linked to them by the Ultra Violet Loop shuttle.

"For Real" continues at 601 Wood St. (above the "T") through Dec. 31. Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. Ad-

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mission to gallery and events is free. For information, call 412-471-5605.

Folk art sale

A folk art show and sale will be held at the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center, Strip District, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. today and tomorrow in conjunction with the exhibitions "Contemporary Folk Art: Treasures from the Smithsonian American Art Museum" and "Western Pennsylvania Folk Art."

At 2 p.m. today, Lisa Miles will talk about researching her recently released book, "The Fantastic Struggle: The Life and Art of Esther Phillips."

Both events are free with museum admission. For information, call 412-454-6000.

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