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ART REVIEW; The Hamptons, A Playground For Creativity

By KEN JOHNSON

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"North Fork/South Fork: East End Art Now," an exhibition at the Parrish Art Museum here, celebrates artists who reside seasonally or permanently in the area around what is popularly known as the Hamptons. Organized by the Parrish's curator, Alicia Longwell, with help from the independent curator and critic Klaus Kertess, this uneven but pleasantly innocuous show includes many well-known figures: Ross Bleckner, John Chamberlain, Chuck Close, Eric Fischl, Barbara Kruger and David Salle, among others.

Part 1 of the survey, on view here earlier in the summer, had a similarly luminous roster, with work by Vija Celmins, Robert Gober, April Gornik, Malcolm Morly and Elizabeth Peyton (who also organized a small artist's choice exhibition of works from the Parrish's collection).

As Ms. Longwell tells the story in her catalog essay, Long Island's bifurcated East End has been attracting artists since the late 1870's, when a group of artists calling themselves the Tiling Club (they painted tiles in the winter) ventured here for a highly successful sketching expedition. In 1891 the American academician William Merritt Chase established the Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art, the nation's first school of plein-air painting.

During World War II European refugees like André Breton and Max Ernst spent time in the Hamptons. After the war the area was still sufficiently undeveloped that an impecunious artist couple like Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner could afford to buy property, enabling Pollock to escape the pressures of the city, stop drinking and produce his breakthrough drip paintings.

The list of artists who have sojourned on the East End from the 1950's on is long and varied. It includes Willem de Kooning, Fairfield Porter, Larry Rivers and Frank Stella among many others. The artists selected by Ms. Longwell and Mr. Kertess are also a varied lot. They range in age from around 30 to around 80, and the styles represented are correspondingly wide ranging. The show includes works of painterly realism, photography-based painting, postmodernist image appropriation, funky sculpture, video projections and more.

Disappointingly, it all adds up to something less than the sum of its parts. There are some substantial works: a large, photo-based portrait of the painter Lisa Yuskavage by Mr. Close; a fluttery sculptural abstraction made of crumpled, candy-colored auto body metal by Mr. Chamberlain; and a poured-paint diptych by Joe Zucker that is composed

of a black monochrome rectangle over a schematic image of a schooner. A fountain made of blobby cast metal by Lynda Benglis has a nice grotesquely organic presence; and a field of wiggly green lines on a hot pink ground by Sue Williams is sexy and optically captivating. But these are absorbed into a generally leveling, pluralistic hodgepodge.

Outdoors on the lawn a cartoonish sculpture of an angel who has crashed to earth, an installation by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, is momentarily diverting. So is Tony Oursler's fake meteorite with a grotesque face video-projected onto it: installed just outside the front door to the museum, it speaks in a rumbling, comically scary voice, warning: "Walk away! Turn around and walk away! It may be your last chance!"

Back inside other electrically animated works include an assemblage of colored neon lights and a metal ladder by Keith Sonnier; continuously running surfing movies by Michael Halsband; and Donald Moffett's video image of the Ramble in Central Park -- a historic gay cruising spot -- projected on a metallic paint-coated canvas to mildly intriguing illusionistic effect.

Traditionalists include Billy Sullivan, whose nude and still-life paintings are made with deft, Bonnardian sensuousness; Robert Harms, who renders yellow heliotrope blossoms with a heavy painterly hand; and Jane Wilson, whose expansive, dark blue seascape approaches Rothko-esque abstraction.

Despite portentously dour paintings by Mr. Bleckner and Mr. Fischl, the show has a generally cheerful feeling. This is enhanced by Mary Heilmann's bright, brusquely made abstract painting and colorful home-made deck chairs, and by Tony Just's painting of radiating green stripes with the hand-painted words "Celebrate Trees" written over them.