

CULTURE

'Multicultural Showcase' aptly named

By Lori Veit

For the Fitchburg Star

Haunting, humorous, and uplifting, this plainly titled exhibition is a true celebration of diversity, and the collection spreads its wings in Promega's naturally lit two-story atrium-cum-art gallery.

Folk art provides an intimate narrative of how cultural conditions shape a life. It's easy to get lost in the worlds of these artists and to develop an appreciation of what it's like to have walked a mile in their shoes, or the shoes of their subjects.

A Life Lost is one of the portraits in a series by native Clevelander



Eric Neuwirth

Anna Arnold's *A Life Lost* accompanies a poem by the artist's Sister.

Anna Arnold. Like the others in its series, it is framed along with a poem created by her sister. *A Life Lost* describes a woman at the end of her life. Arnold, who juxtaposes sunny colors and bold, courageous paint strokes with the utter pathos of her subjects generates an electric and moving tribute to the human spirit.

Contrasting Arnold, artist Gethsemene Seferopoulos, from Thessaloniki, Greece, creates collage-style portraits using images of mermaids and elements of pop art. The canvases are bright and sensual, like her homeland, with silver accents suggesting sunlit seas. The works are glorious not only in their sheer size, but in the subject's smiles, and the childlike swirls and scrawls of color. These are the works of a woman-child, who resides in a peaceful, self-contained world, unencumbered by any hint of strife.

Curator Daniel Swadener, of Swadener Art Services, (who produces all of the exhibitions for the Promega Gallery) said, "I've brought this group of six artists from three continents together in an attempt to show how different cultures illustrate the human condition. They all use the human figure as an expression of what is inside all of us."

"The exhibit started with the concept of outsider art, i.e., artists on the outside of mainstream society." (An example of an "outsider" artist might be the street-smart Jean-Michel Basquiat, who rose from obscurity, but whose working



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The playful nature of Gethsemene Seferopoulos is evident in her piece, *Little Men with Beautiful Clothes*.

life of about nine years ended with a heroin overdose at the age of 27.) Swadener continued, "I think the definition has changed through the years, and I didn't like what I was seeing as labeled 'outsider.' These works all have a feel of the outsider movement, but not as I've seen it defined."

Two Wisconsin artists - Andy Ewen, and P.S. Mueller - provide more American social commentary, and some comic relief.

Ewen's colorful, dynamic pen and ink cartoons employ an acerbic perspective of modern life. His illustrations have appeared in the *Isthmus*, the *New York Times Book*

Review, and the *Progressive*. He also performs in the local group Honor Among Thieves.

Cartoonist P.S. Mueller's trademark single panel black and white cartoons provide a humorous glimpse into how our own culture uses and abuses words to spin an agenda, and push the envelope. His work has graced the pages of the *New Yorker* and *George* magazines.

Born in Ndanda, Tanzania, Robino Nula is a well-respected etching artist in East and Southern Africa, and his works illustrate traditional historical as well as modern life in Africa. His etchings have the effect of dreamy snapshots, reminiscent of post-impressionists Henri Rousseau or Paul Gauguin.

Professor Harold Zisla, from South Bend, Ind., has an illustrious international presence, and taught at Indiana University.

Zisla's large, energetic abstractions provide an engaging counterpoint to the rest of the show. The sheer number of canvases, and the orderly, linear layout of Swadener's installation maximize their impact. The expansive gallery walls groan with almost twice as many pieces as usually exhibited (around 140), and also with a rich humanity that's not measured as much as it's sensed, felt, and understood.

The exhibit runs through Sept. 29 at the Promega Gallery in the Biopharmaceutical Technology Center, 5445 East Cheryl Parkway. The exhibit is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., or by appointment.