

SUSAN EVE JAHODA



Susan Eve Jahoda, Untitled. Handcolored photograph, 36 x 45". Courtesy Area X Gallery.

particularly evident in a piece in which mother and daughter hold each other in the background, seemingly in a world apart from the father, an eerie veil of color cast over the family.

The images, though deeply personal, appeal to us on a universal level. The figures alternately assume stances of authority and resignation, caring and indifference. At times, the older members withdraw into fetal positions. Even in this age of uncertainty, the family in its many guises remains a standard of stability, nurture, and human discourse. It is above all an emblem for love, and Jahoda therefore exploits its iconic as well as narrative content.

In one especially potent image, father and daughter "confront" one another (their glances

do not actually meet) as the exotic multi-colored snakeskin echoing man's fall from grace unites the space behind them. Despite their mirrored features the daughter stands a shade in front, resolute and independent. One might think of Wordsworth's "The child is the father of the Man." With bold finality Jahoda acknowledges how each generation inevitably supplants the previous one, yet bears the weight of its vestiges.

These are pictures tinged with sadness while bathed in an unearthly beauty. Whether set in the home or garden they embark from familiar territory toward a heightened expressiveness, as the faces, left in black and white or barely colored, project from their muted surroundings. The long camera exposure gives the

proceedings a sense of permanence, while lending the subjects an air of unease not so unlike the American primitive forebears who occupy a nearby gallery at the Montclair Museum.

Jahoda's choreographed family presents a world where love is imperfect, where love encompasses rejection and possessiveness. The art is overtly theatrical, perhaps a touch heavy-handed, yet shows increasing maturity. Her distinctive working method raises tinted photography (altered paper prints rather than negatives) far above the 19th-century creations for the parlor. We take notice, and rethink our location within a human chain and collective unconscious. (Area X, April 17-May 24)

Jonathan Kuhn

Seeing Susan Eve Jahoda's pictures is like being invited to peruse Ingmar Bergman's private photo albums. In mural-sized hand-colored photographs of her family, Jahoda explores, with a probing eye, a matrix of relationships. Ultimately her inquiry into this fundamental human drama yields mystery more than resolution.

Jahoda's recent exhibition at the Montclair Art Museum created an aura of solemnity comparable to that of a sanctuary. On a wall facing the entrance, a triptych of husband and wife suggested a secular *sacra conversazione* of gesture and silent communication. On adjoining walls, the theme of the family expanded into a complex web of connections, embracing (though a pained embrace at times) parents, children, spouses, siblings. The artist asks that we consider the pieces as a group installation of separate yet interlocking components.

The melancholy substance of these pictures is enhanced by a technique of extended exposure time in the photographic process complemented by drawing. The participants (at times including the artist herself) are carefully staged before a view camera that makes possible an image of striking clarity and timelessness. The lack of spontaneity relieves the sitters from the impulse to project a desired self-image. Thus, paradoxically, a contrived group portrait results in something more "true" than the everyday snapshot.

The photographs, greatly enlarged, are fleshed out with pencil, oilstick, and pastel in radiant color schemes reminiscent of Bonnard. In Jahoda's earlier pieces, inanimate interior scenes colored with soft hues exposed the fragility of surface reality. In fact, two props (the snakeskin and the x-ray) also used in the works on view at Montclair allude to the layers of matter and meaning.

In her figurative work prior to the output of the last two years, color occupied a heightened place, with a decorative importance. In the current work the palette acts as foil to the initial image, frequently intensifying the aesthetic/emotional experience. Jahoda may reinvent details as she constructs a richly sensuous setting or distorts spatial reality. This distortion is