

BANNARD INTRODUCTION

Walter Darby Bannard is a most impressive person. His resume goes on for page after single-spaced page, not about how often he was accepted into the Rocky Hill (that is where he lives) Artcenter area show (if there is such a thing), but instead, about showing his pictures at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney, the Smithsonian, the Venice Biennale, the Metropolitan, the L. A. County Museum, and the Guggenheim. And about one-man shows at Tibor de Nagy, Richard Feigen, Nicholas Wilder, David Mirvish, Lawrence Rubin, the Pasadena Art Museum, the Baltimore Museum, Knoedler Contemporary Art, and the Edmonton Art Gallery.

It lists over 200 published articles which refer to his work as an artist or art writer. And nearly a hundred more published essays or statements written by him. In Artforum, Art in America, Art International, the New York Times, Art News, Time, The Village Voice, the London Times, Studio International, Life, Vogue, The Print Collector's Newsletter, Ceramics Monthly, the New Art Examiner, The New Criterion, Arts, and others. And over 150 lectures and residencies at universities and museums all across the country.

Still, these things are not really what impress me so much about Darby Bannard. He would be the first to say that the attention paid to him has lately declined, starting with his decision some time ago to abandon the hard-edge style which first brought him public notice. What impresses me more than the actual list of his accomplishments is that he has paid this price of inattention because he took his art higher, made his critical voice sharper and more outrageous, and that he has persisted making better art and writing these sharper essays in the face of louder and louder opposition. Opposition that includes the likes of Donald Kuspit last year with his inane attack on Bannard and Greenberg, and now Carter Ratcliff, who calls Darby a "Cassandra Critic." Though Ratcliff is not entirely off the point, despite his generic insensitivity and often bad eye. Darby Bannard is a "Cassandra Critic" in the tradition of St. John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and others, including Cassandra herself, who recognized that something was

seriously wrong with the tendencies of their own time. Not such bad company.

More important, though, and something which escapes Ratcliff's small vision: Darby Bannard continues to outlast his opposition, he wears them down with his insistence on truth clearly worded, with his accomplishment in the studio, or simply stated, just by going on with the work of high, serious art. His devotion to, his grasp of, his understanding of, the enterprise we know as serious art: all this is matched only by his contribution to it--that rare case of fulfilled intention.

So, as impressive as his resume might be, the depth and penetration of his writing, and the goodness of his art, both outshine the list of things he's done. They embody what the scholastic philosophers called "claritas," the radiance which makes fine things so fine, so worthwhile, so valuable, in themselves, for their own sake. The radiance which satisfies so thoroughly what the scholastics associated it with, the Beatific Vision. That he has outlasted the opposition is, if I can be excused for appearing presumptuous, expected. That's right, expected. Really good artists last, really serious artists don't stop when fashion turns its fickle attention elsewhere. They get better, no matter what the cost. They don't go along with the crowd, instead, they go along with art. That is exactly why I wanted Darby to talk with us tonight: he continues to go along with art. That is what impresses me most about this man. That is why I can't wait to hear his talk: "Pluralism: a Bad Idea for Art." It will be funny, of that I'm sure. It will also go to the core of what is happening with art these days. That is what I've come to expect of Darby Bannard. I hope he doesn't mind my taking him so seriously.

AD LIB ON OUT