

# ENTERTAINMENT

## Grab bag has too few bright spots

By RICHARD HUNTINGTON  
*News Art Critic*

Barbara Rusin's large and ambitious painting, "After Venus," the first-place winner, is more than the centerpiece of an otherwise lackluster exhibition. In this single work, this Buffalo artist manages to give some semblance of meaning — however fleeting — to the exhibition's hopelessly overblown title.

Ms. Rusin's piece is precisely about art and how artists — mostly male — have shaped the Western view of woman. Ms. Rusin heads right back to the roots of Western Civilization by giving the painting an architectural framework based on a Greek temple. At top there's a pediment and below that an updated version of a Greek frieze, this one made up of photocopies of world-famous standing nudes by artists from Rubens to Cranach and on to Picasso and Gauguin.

Then comes the triglyphs and metopes, that band of alternating blocks and space that helps give Greek facades their formal dignity. That dignity is quickly shattered, however, by a huge torso filling the lower half of the painting.

This giant female figure, cut at the waist and the thighs, is audaciously confrontational. Shaved and cadaverous, this over-muscled close-up seems a death figure. There is not a whit of affirmation here. The figure is a morbidly de-sexed body builder, a woman who has appropriated male power by turning her body into an object of anatomical display.

But as grim as it is, the figure

### REVIEW

#### Art and the Woman Artist

A national show of art by women selected by Barbara Haskell, curator of painting and sculpture at the Whitney Museum of Art.

Through Friday in the Clary-Minner Gallery, 698 Main St.

has a compelling reality compared with the smaller male versions of the female body shown above. With this monstrous figure Ms. Rusin has undercut the very assumptions of male eroticism in Western art. If the figure is a perversion, then it is a perversion created by the distorted views of female sexuality perpetuated by male artists down through the centuries.

And this painting is not only a critique of sexuality. It also is a critique of Western rationality — an assault on the very thought processes and attitudes that underlie our civilization.

Ancient codes of beauty — as seen in architecture and the rendering of female nudes — are shown here to be techniques of control. Ms. Rusin's version of Greek architecture is displayed here as restricting, even claustrophobic. Figures are trapped in their confining rows or cut off by cold stone and a gloomy, brownish atmosphere prevades all.

Little else has such forceful relevance to the intended theme of the show. Mannequins seem the main conduit for works with any pointed feminist content. Buffalo artist Frani Evedon offers a potent

commentary on contemporary sexual relations in her photograph called "Executive Sweet," in which a mannequin confronts a bank of sexual toys.

And then Sharry Stabbert makes an effort to portray violence against women with an image of a hanger hung in the opening of a mannequin's eye, coupling it with an image of a "wounded" tree.

Otherwise the show is pretty much a survey of old styles remade by women artists. Some are engaging — Ann Sugnet's icon-like relief "Whitest Heart," for instance. But too many are dull re-treads of abstract expressionism or jazzed up versions of the many pseudo-folk styles that have emerged in recent years. There are such hapless items as Caplyn Dor's low-budget "Al Held," with its awkward abstract perspectives heaped with little regard to composition and Lucy Synk's sci-fi atrocity, "Trinity."

The photographs are mostly conventional — vignettes and foggy figures — while the sculpture barely gets started with such merely pleasant works as Sherry Karver's clay wall piece, "The Survivors."

The show has the sense that lost souls had drifted in from every corner of the earth to meet for no particular purpose. Irresolution is always the difficulty with a juried show, and it becomes all the more irresolute when the viewer expects to see some focused view of woman and art and gets instead a grab bag by artists who happen to be women.