

VERMONT ARTS



Leon Golub: *Gigantomachy III*, 1966, acrylic on linen.

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Lois Dodd *"Men's Shelter, March #2,"* 1968, oil on linen.

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LEON GOLUB & LOIS DODD

Nature and human nature at Hall Art

By B. AMORE

ARTS CORRESPONDENT

The debut exhibitions at Hall Art Foundation, its first since the pandemic, is a blockbuster. Two lifelong painters, Leon Golub and Lois Dodd, are featured in the multiple buildings that compose the foundation campus, under the direction of Maryse Brand. The complex exhibits are arranged chronologically, by artist, and have excellent signage, and presentation books with relevant information, that make a viewing extremely visitor friendly. There are also QR codes, which activate voice explanations for auditory accessibility.

Leon Golub

The Golub exhibition moves seamlessly through three buildings. The first, his early work from Chicago years when he was one of the "enfants terrible" of the Chicago School, really reveals his evolution through the '50s and '60s in a series of "portraits" that trace his evolution. The earliest, "Skull," in conte crayon from 1947, is a foretaste of what is to come — the sense of looking with horror into the universal nature of violence between fellow human beings.

Golub painted in Paris for a period of five years 1959-64, leaving the Abstract Expressionist hegemony of New York. Paintings like "Le Jeune Epebe," "Reclining Youth," 1961, and "Untitled Head," 1960, show a classical influence and an almost sculptural presence. Numerous conte and sanguine pencil studies of figures in motion are keys to the gestural, abstracted figure paintings that follow in the '70s.

When he and his wife Nancy Spero returned from Paris in the mid-1960s, they participated in the Artists and Writers Protest Group. Golub's "Gigantomachy III," 1968, looks like a free-for-all of nude humanity gone mad. The central awkwardly distorted figure with an outsized foot is kicking a supine victim, surrounded by other attacking figures.

The 9-by-17-foot painting in expressionistic acrylic, with paint

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The Hall Art Foundation presents Leon Golub & Lois Dodd, through Nov. 27, painters, at its galleries, 544 Vermont Route 106 in Reading. Admission is by appointment only; call 802-952-1056, or go online to www.hallartfoundation.org

actually scraped away in places with a meat cleaver, shows deeply disturbing aspects of human nature and one wonders if more people were exposed to these images

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if anything would change.

In a series of "Portraits" painted between '76-'78, Golub used unposed media photographs of public figures as source material for over 100 portraits. Kissinger, Le Duc Tho, Pinochet, Mao Tse-Tung, Fidel Castro, Brezhnev, Franco, Dulles are among these, all of which are painted in acrylic on linen in an open, understated sketch-like style, as if the reality of the individual is difficult to grasp as the mask changes so often. These are critical statements of men who held public positions of power, disguising their often-destructive acts with a uniform or a suit and tie.

The last series of paintings shown in this extensive exhibit speak to ongoing acts of coercive oppression in the world. The figures are now clothed. "The Arrest," 1990, in which a grinning white figure is pinning a black man against the wall at gunpoint, while another black face helplessly looks on from the left edge of the painting, seems terribly prescient of the recent arrest of George Floyd by Derek Chauvin. The background is more present in fragmented planes of color as opposed to raw linen, and the sense of intricately connected figure and ground alludes to how pervasive racism is.

Golub positions the viewer right up close to the aggression — stating that "Painting is static, it can be very insistent — it doesn't go away, so the viewer may have to turn away." "Two Heads II," 1987, and "Three Heads I," 1986, are stark, mysterious portraits of black men who gaze directly into the viewers eyes

as if trying to share their complex realities. Golub was one of the few white artists to be included in the Whitney Museum's 1994 exhibition "The Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art."

Lois Dodd

Moving into Lois Dodd's work in the last two buildings that house the present exhibit, one enters the antithesis of the world that Golub painted, although many of their painting years overlapped. Both artists are keen observers of diverse aspects of our complex world. Dodd concentrates on the physical world surrounding her in the Delaware Water Gap, Midcoastal Maine and her East Second Street loft.

"Men's Shelter, March #2," 1968, and "Night Sky Loft," 1973, show two views from her city studio, the former in geometric flattened shapes, the second a dark cityscape with punctuations of rectangular windows. These contrast with her studies of "Broken Windows," 1975, in Maine where she was fascinated with the patterns of broken glass that pierced the geometry of the panes. "Sun in Hallway," 1978, gives a sense of a settled space but still carries us on a journey, which is a signature of her work, whether the scenes are set indoors or in nature.

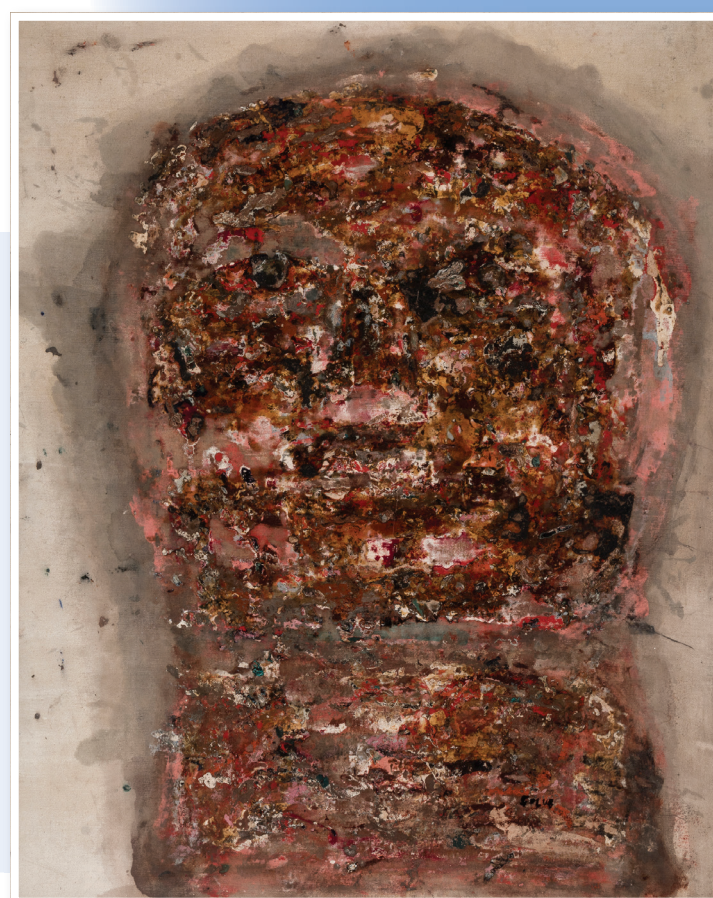
Dodd's many paintings of woods are arranged in rooms by seasons, and one is entering an entirely different world, depending on whether the scene is spring, summer, fall or winter. Many of the large five-foot summer paintings were done in several morning and evening sessions in order to keep the shadows relatively consistent. Dodd would cover them in plastic and tie them to a tree so they wouldn't fall down overnight. Her dedication to an honesty of involvement in the moment brings an infinite freshness and liveliness to the work.

A series of paintings of snow scenes appear to be painted rapidly, en plein air, even during deep winter. The strokes are often gestural and have a sense of immediacy which is rare in oil painting. One can feel the coolness in the air, the brightness of sun on snow, the motion of a half-frozen brook. Of "Moon Shadows," 1992, one of several works painted at night, Dodd shares, "I worked in the dark, literally. It was totally painting by feel, (like) finger painting." The pieces are mysterious and engaging, with the play of shadow on blue-gray snow.

In the final building that houses Dodd's work, a love of domesticity is apparent, especially in her lines of laundry, which are a staple of country life. "Green Towel," filled with wind, floats in space as if it is ready to take off. It is a play on rectangles, with a parallelogram of a shadow beneath it, complemented by the curve of a hill and a blue sky.

"Step Ruin with Figure," 1997-2001, is an unusually experimental piece for Dodd who usually paints what is right in front of her. A woman is seen from behind, climbing stairs to an open doorway filled with greenery, in the ruins of a historic house that is being demolished. There is a sense of history, old and new life, a kind of possibility.

Dodd's painting "Shadow with



Leon Golub: *"Head,"* 1961, oil and lacquer on canvas.

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Lois Dodd: *"Shadow with Easel,"* 2010, oil on linen.

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Leon Golub: *"Le Jeune Epebe, Reclining Youth,"* 1961, oil on canvas.

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Easel," 2010, is an unplanned "self-portrait" that she spontaneously started to paint when she happened to notice her own shadow on uncut grass in intense summer sunshine. The shadow and easel are juxtaposed against the lawn, "stretched out" in a semi-abstract manner. She looks as if she is actually in front of us painting in silhouette, with bits of grass blowing around her.

The combination of these two painters definitely provides a very full viewing visit to the Hall Art Foundation. They address

two different perspectives on the world, which we humans continue to create, with its juxtapositions of beauty and cruelty, tragedy and everyday life. We are constantly bombarded in our homes, cars, televisions, with views of happenings distant from the intimate mundanity in which many privileged people live. These exhibits remind us that one reality does not cancel out an opposite one. We are left with the quintessential question of how to balance both.

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Lois Dodd: *"Green Towel,"* 1980, oil on linen.

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