

# Another way of looking at the world

## 'Place' depicts landscapes in unusual ways

By WILLIAM JAEGER  
Special to the Times Union

**P**lace," an elegant and very becoming show of two painters and two mixed-media artists at the Mandeville Gallery at Union College, is ostensibly a show of landscapes. But none of these works, handsomely spread around the Nott Memorial, depicts the landscape in any usual way.

Instead, viewers find themselves positioned within the environment, be it real or imaginary, abstract or fanciful. We are given ways to look at the world, ways to turn observation into hard data, and ways to imagine what can't be seen, or what is usually overlooked.

Painters Sharon Horwath and Mary Hambleton each give an impression not of describing cold facts about the world, but of representing its underlying logic and layout. Suzanne Bocanegra literally matches colors in the landscape with her handmade color swatches, which are integrated into small still lifes or sculptures. Robin Hill, who is credited with the idea for the show, has a series of works on the floor that grasp at relationships between things, at the intrinsic and relative nature of placement within a larger context.

It is perhaps Hill who has the most intriguing and, in some ways, most accessible pieces. Each of her eight works has a similar design. A sheet

of 3-by-4-foot brown paper is spread on the floor, and an object or a group of objects is arranged methodically over its surface. For example, the most basic one is "Centerpiece," which has a small circle neatly cut out of the center of the sheet, and an apple sitting in the circle. That's all.

This seems rather too reductive by itself, but Hill's other works support its lyrical minimalism. "Trails," for example, has 20 amber colored, solid rubber objects shaped like paper cups strewn on the brown paper. Oily stains are scattered about, as if the cups had spilled and left behind trails of liquid. These may seem to have little to do with a description of "Place," but it does describe things and their relationship to a contrived artificial environment.

"Channel," the most complex and for me the most rewarding work, is made of a bed of paper 2 inches thick, cut from telephone books and arranged endwise, like carpeting. These are positioned neatly, forming a rectangle with a vertical stripe down the middle. A piece of glass sits flat on top of this, like a table top. On the glass are three piles of what the artist calls "phonebook dust," each a little disheveled. This is no replica of a channel, but a symbolic view of some qualities of a channel, in this case suggesting, perhaps, the kinds of underground rivers found in deserts.

This kind of strategy, using what we might call pretty symbolism, occurs throughout the show. The green and brown, primitivist paintings by Horwath use irregular green and blue patches to imply old-fashioned maps. The approximate, hand-drawn feeling of scale and shape of

the landforms implies an era of mapmaking prior to aerial views and scientific analysis. Horwath takes the essential elements of maps — the flatness, the meandering blue lines, and the pencilled grids of streets — and works them into the fairly spare surfaces of the canvases. Even the titles, such as "Isolario (Four) Greenpoint Series," suggest a generic appropriation of maplike appearances.

The suggestion of planets, stars, and atoms in the works of Hambleton are stylized beyond the generic into the purely decorative. Her paintings and prints of circles and rays suggest the order and energy of a physicist's world. The exhibition brochure calls the small, square paintings "expansive," but they struck me as tightly contained and central.

Colorful circles and lines are woven into well-designed packages, illustrating the cosmos. Usually, as in "Atomic Boogie," the thick white paint applied in clumpy textures and the bright round circles on top are exercises in creative illustration. Though lively, they lack the well-reasoned complexity of the other works.

Bocanegra's five wall-mounted works are intriguing both for their attractive physical construction using paper, cloth, wood, and other odd materials, as well as for their conceptual approach. The artist takes colors out of the real world and quantifies them in fanciful ways like merchandise samples — carpet fragments of different designs — that would fit into the landscape if you held them just so at arm's length.

Take "Table of Colours for Cattle," which is dominated by an 8-inch-wide cloth banner hanging from 7 feet high to the floor. At the bottom are a group of little legs and enve-

### Art review

#### "PLACE,"

■ WHERE: Mandeville Gallery, Nott Memorial, Union College, Schenectady. Phone: 388-6004.

■ WHEN: Through Jan. 26. Hours: Sunday-Thursday, noon-10 p.m., Friday and Saturday, noon-5 p.m.

lopes made of waxed paper or fabric. Inside these, or applied to the surface, different colors are evident, sometimes as smudges of pigment, other times as part of the fabric. (Cow colors, I presume.)

At the top of the banner, a pair of bizarre brown plastic spheres with tails of string are sitting inexplicably.

Bocanegra's range of materials, natural colors, and simple arrangements on the wall are clearly made with an adult's artistic sensibility. They are, at the same time, essentially childlike, and this is much of their appeal. The set of small white discs on little shelves for "Table of Colours for Sunsets, All Parts of Sky" are reminiscent of a set of dolls' dishes. The little dots of maroon, red, cerulean, and yellow on the dishes are like quick but precious bits of chroma literally scraped from the sky and preserved.

"Place" is delicate and multi-layered. And like any good show, it makes you yearn for more. But even if it strikes you as incomplete, or dwarfed by the majestic building, savor it; it will stick with you.