

## ART

By Eileen Watkins

A fan of motorcycles and boxing, Alex Piccirillo may not fit the average person's conception of an artist who works in pastels. Nevertheless, the Nutley resident is serious enough about his art to have received the honorary title of Master Pastellist with the Pastel Society of America. He believes the medium bridges the gap between drawing and painting, and gives an artist the ability to work anywhere.

He shows more than two dozen of his pieces through June 1 at the Wyckoff Gallery, Wyckoff. Most of them have been executed within the past six months.

When Piccirillo works "on the spot," he takes small canvases to such nearby locales as Memorial Park in Nutley. His soft-focus views of the "Third River" winding its way beneath the old stone overpasses of Centre Street and Vreeland Avenue, in various seasons, have a picturesque, almost European quality.

For most of his larger works, he uses plywood or illustration board. He lays down a mixture of pumice, water and gesso, which he tints in a deep-toned wash, to create the background. He then applies the pastels in a light-over-dark technique, which gives them a velvety richness.

The subjects in these cases are usually character studies or still lifes, often with symbolic overtones.

"Dawn's Dream" is a portrait of a red-haired woman whose full, turquoise dress reveals that she is pregnant. In "The Cloak (Marie Testa)," the subject's dramatic clothing expresses much about her personality. The same can be said for the dance leotards worn by "Janice Phipps."

Signs of hard living can be seen in the visages of the wild-haired woman "La Donna Salvaggio," done in pastel, and the seated older man "Ralph Fabricatore," painted in oils. The music he is playing on his saxophone totally absorbs the young, bearded man depicted in "Angelo Bak-er Blues."

When Piccirillo turns to self-portraiture, he includes playful and ironic twists. A large work features him in his studio near an easel, from which hangs "The Effigy," a rag doll wearing the badge of the U.S. Postal Service. The artist's arm bears a rose tattoo, and he holds a pair of rose-colored glasses.

"A Day in the Life" shows the front page of a newspaper touting Piccirillo as a champion heavyweight boxer.

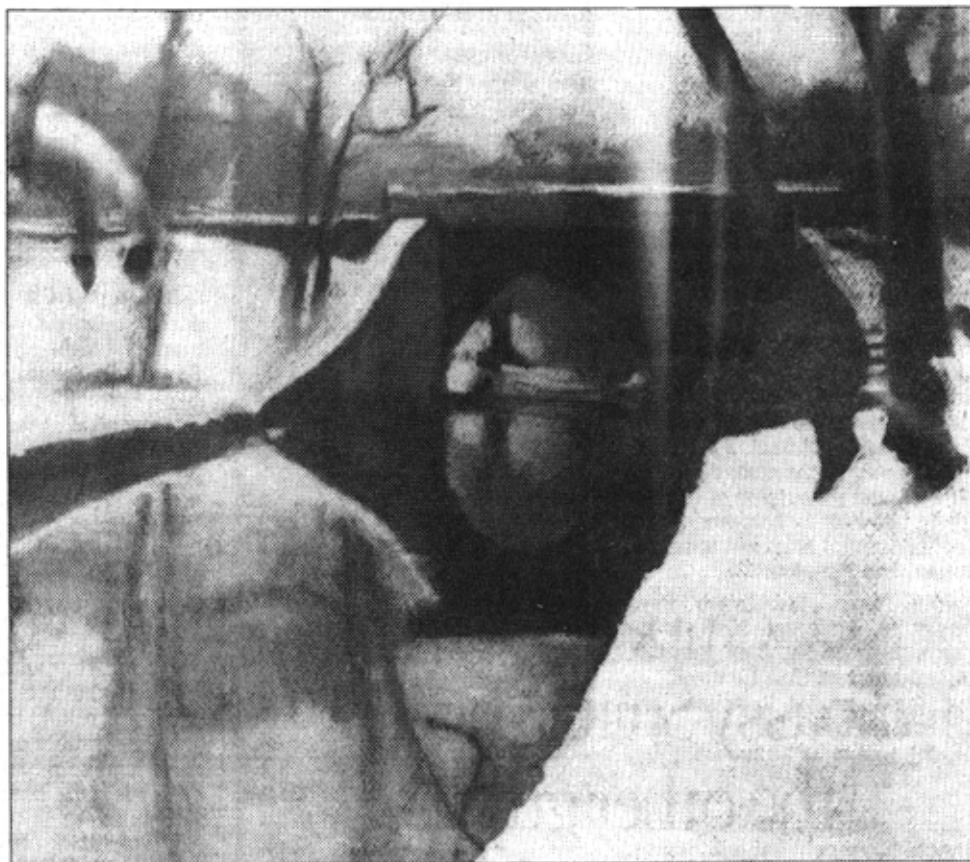


Photo by George McNish

(Above) A detail from "Centre Street Overpass," a work in pastel by Alex Piccirillo of Nutley. The artist has a one-man showing through June 1 at the Wyckoff Gallery

Another tribute to his abandoned hopes of a career in the ring can be found in his still life "The Final Round," which juxtaposes a pair of boxing gloves and a branch of cherry blossoms. He captures more conventional views of the sport with his ringside closeups "Golden Gloves" and "Panic in the Corner."

The artist takes his interest in symbolism a few steps further—quite successfully—for his interior "Farewell Dolores Jean." Most of the scene is shown in a vast mirror held by Piccirillo's wife, who wears a feathered carnival mask. In the reflection, a second woman in an easy chair watches a bird fly through her living room. The picture represents a mysterious incident that the couple witnessed, in conjunction with the death of a friend.

Piccirillo's show can be seen tomorrow, from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Wyckoff Gallery, Inc., 210 Everett Ave. Gallery director is Sherry Cosloy.