

ART REVIEWS

ART REVIEWS; Character and Mood, on Paper

By Helen A. Harrison

'Perfect Pitch'

Islip Art Museum, 50 Irish Lane, East Islip, (631) 224-5402. Through June 13.

The analogy between visual art and music is something of a cliché, but this invitational exhibition takes a fresh and sometimes provocative look at the subject, with pieces by four visual artists inspired by music and three who are also professional musicians.

The late composer Earle Brown, represented here by scores that are closer to free-form drawings than to music notations, was a colleague of John Cage and Morton Feldman. Like them, he felt kinship with modern artists, and saw in Alexander Calder and Jackson Pollock examples of spontaneity.

Mr. Brown's spirit lives on in the wonderful, room-size "robot jukebox" -- a kind of musical Rube Goldberg contraption that plays a pre-programmed concert on wacky mechanized instruments -- by the artist, musician and composer Kurt Coble.

"Sound Fields," an installation by the third composer-artist, Joe Diebes, presents a roomful of fake sunflowers wired with speakers that hum, buzz and signal in Morse code. What should be a calming experience of walking through a field of flowers instead becomes a deliberately confusing aural assault.

Conversely, Stephen Sollins is interested in the absence of sound. His elegant, minimal drawings represent the rests in the scores of popular tunes like the aptly titled "In the Still of the Night." He has also created an array of horn mutes, cast in translucent acrylic, that sculpturally symbolize musical silence.

Germaine Keller's manipulated Hudson River photographs highlight the contrast between music's manmade structures and those found in nature. Grids like music scores are superimposed on pictures of rocks and rotten piers, which rhythmically punctuate the water like notes on a staff.

Randy Gerber's paintings on old piano rolls and Joseph Wardwell's illustrations of popular song lyrics painted on guitar-body shapes are other examples of offbeat takes on musical inspiration.

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