

Hensel takes advantage of artistic values in handmade books

By James R. Nelson
Special to The News

A New Vocabulary: Unique and Limited Edition Artist Books by Susan Hensel, AGNES Gallery, through May 31.

Book is defined as "any series of pages, written or printed, that is fastened along one side and encased between protective covers."

For the artist, a book is also a work of art, defined by each individual page and filled with visual and tactile wonders that reach far beyond the conventional uses of bound information or entertainment.

Susan Hensel has discovered how to take advantage of the artistic values found in handmade books. She explores the world of sensate response by creating volumes that appeal to the eye, the sense of touch

ART HAPPENINGS

and above all, the wonder of the mind when in contact with an idea.

Hensel's books are presented in a variety of ways. Some are contained in frame-like boxes and held in place in frames on the wall. The viewer pulls a tab at the base of the book and it is released from its box-like frame to be held and explored for its contents and then returned to its home.

Other works are accordion-fold pages that open as a continuous running surface. Some of the books contain short, pithy statements isolated on exquisite pages of flowing color while others are simply pages of color without text of any sort.

The most intricate works are those which are made up of bound envelopes, with each envelope containing a message or a creatively imaged stamp that suggests the purpose and destiny of the envelope.

Hensel uses handmade papers that convey to the eye as well as the hand a wonderful feeling for texture and volume. To handle one of her books is to experience a sense of loving communication. The care and creative conscience that goes into creating these works is transmitted by touch, and each page is an expanding experience for the spectator.

Complementing Hensel's exhibition are other handmade books by Michael Jacobs, Marc Blocker, Denise Carbone and Mary Ann Sampson.

These handmade books offer a delightful and revelatory exhibition that should be a great pleasure to all.

Recent Works by Ginny Lu Bunting Green, the Cabaness Fine Arts Center, Alhambra School, through June 2.
This collection of works, which could have been done by three

different artists, contains paintings that are masses of thick pigment, abstractions that are collage fragments attached to a neutral ground and wispy, dreamlike figures that float in ether-like imaginary extensions of form.

The most satisfactory works are those which use the thick impasto to create a visually tactile surface serving the subject matter in a satisfactory manner.

Charming little full-face portrait studies, filled with wistful wonder and innocent vitality, succeed in conveying a sense of gentle reflection. Several woodland scenes with little, rambling girls are exuberant demonstrations of textural studies.

Green's abstractions are strong and colorful. The better ones are those which take full advantage of coherent design to produce a single effect. One of the best is titled "Gift to Alhambra."
Problematic are the collage

works involving attached slabs and strips of painted canvas. Some of the attachments are arranged in a strict geometric order. In others the attached pieces are cut and glued in a random, often overlapping manner. This technique gives a surface strength to the composition but there is a lack of depth and focus that reduces the composition to a jumbled plane of underdeveloped ideas.

A series of paintings dealing with the religious theme of angels has a certain degree of pensive charm. I suspect everyone has a vision of what angels look like, and I suppose what should respect someone else's perception, but allowances aside, these insipid walls lack appeal as messengers of the Almighty.

New Works by Neal Elliot, Elegant Iron, through May 31.
Cutting steel plate with an acetylene torch, Elliot describes a flowing, undulating quality

associated with the imagery of natural forces.

"Water Goddess" is as elegant as flowing water. Its intricately organic design describes a female face with long, flowing hair plunging deep into the depths of clear water.

In "Rising Water," Elliot takes a piece of naturally scupled, knurled wood and mounts it on a steel post. He labels it a natural sculpture, suggesting that he has taken a bit of nature and has presented it without arrangement or change. Aside from the several aesthetic questions that arise from such a presentation, there is no question that the natural beauty of found form is something we can appreciate.

As a member of the stable of artists showing at Elegant Iron, Robert Taylor displays several of his delightful garden sculptures. A verdigris grasshopper, butterfly, praying mantis and frog spring up as if looking for a garden to call home.