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AROUND THE GALLERIES

Collage practiced on theatrical scale

By David Pagel, Special to The Times

Tom Wudl's new works on paper and canvas take collage to extremes, transforming the 100-year-old art form invented by Picasso and Braque into a flexible means for assembling works of great delicacy and poignancy. At L.A. Louver Gallery, the veteran artist's wide-ranging fusions of abstraction and representation draw viewers into quiet dramas whose mystery never grows old.

A 13-by-20-foot drawing, made of fragile sheets of translucent paper meticulously quilted together, presides over the main gallery. It depicts a classic moment of slapstick, with Laurel making a mistake and viewers having a laugh at Hardy's expense. Beautifully rendered pink roses and gray eyeballs frame the central scene, across which float silhouetted hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades.

These symbols suggests that Wudl has not only shuffled the proverbial deck, but dissolved its cards into a swirling stew of possibility. Despite the theater-curtain size of his cut-and-paste picture, it comes off as intimate.

The 17 other works are liberally sprinkled with similar shifts in scale, sense and story. This makes for fractured narratives with many points of entry and even more of departure.

Unlike tried-and-true Cubist collage, whose spaces are jarring, disruptive and generally agitated, Wudl's multilayered pieces create spaces that are gentle, fluid and often filled with graceful movements. Confusion still plays an important role, leading viewers more deeply into enigmas and inviting acrobatic leaps of the imagination.

But loveliness gets the upper hand. Not knowing where a work is going is a large part of its pleasure and essential to the sense of discovery that is Wudl's forte. His art makes an adventure of introspection.



Spokesman
(LA Louver Gallery)