

## Now on View at Julian Beck Gallery

BY MARION WOLBERG-WEISS



Although the summer art season is over, there's a fresh exhibit from a bright newcomer on the block: Bridgehampton's Julian Beck Gallery. The venue itself is eye-catching, with the second floor presenting works by Marilyn Church, Alex Russo and Roz Cole

where the space is pleasantly light and airy. And while these works seem different, they often possess common characteristics, notably their focus on figures and texture. Thematically-speaking, they also all attempt to "reveal" what lies beyond surface reality/nature.

Church has always featured the human figure, perhaps starting from her drawings of individuals involved in court trials. Her emphasis on non-verbal aspects was most important in these instances: facial expression, posture, gesture, eye contact. Environment, too, was salient. Such articulation continued with Church's series showing women in a theatrical setting, where danger sometimes lurked. Again, articulation of the body was evident as was the development of a narrative or story.

In Church's current series, figures are still prevalent, but they are subtle and abstract, appearing as vertical lines. Her setting is abstract as well, consisting of shapes and assemblage-like configurations. Articulation is there, but it's in the

use of color and texture.

Church's themes are equally subtle. Titles like "The Road Less Traveled" and "A Leap into the Unknowable" suggest that reality is a mystery that lies beneath the surface. The artist invites us to ponder this mystery, coming up with a "plot" that recalls her narrative series from the past.



Work by Alex Russo



Work by Marilyn Church

Like Church's work, most of Russo's pieces feature the figure, as in "Procession," where elongated forms represent humans who appear in great pain or physical peril. They can't help but remind us of Holocaust victims although Russo probably didn't have this in mind. They are well-defined and

delineated, their raised surfaces made of canvas resembling an assemblage, a textural device used by Church as well.

Figures are more subtle in Russo's "Spatial Configurations," where colors and shapes blend together. "Lights of Cornwall," celebrating England's southwest coast where Russo has spent a lot of time through the years, has its figures, too, but we don't see them at first. Even so, the more we look, the more we see, as figures come and go, appear and disappear. It's the artist's way of also going beyond surface reality, where nature exists for all eternity.

Cole's figures strike us as boldly different from Church's and Russo's human beings. They are spirited and whimsical, even depicting a group of witches and a warlock for our amusement. The artist's figures seem to float through the air, joyfully going about their merry way.

Yet the theme of going beyond reality shows up in Cole's work as well when she uses scrambled alphabet letters to spell out words like "love." The more we look, the more we see here, too.

*Works by Marilyn Church, Alex Russo and Roz Cole will be on view at Bridgehampton's Julian Beck Gallery (2454 Main Street) until Nov. 30. Call 631-613-6200 for hours and other information.*

## What Makes The Watch Maker's Daughter Tick?

BY JOAN BAUM



From its opening sentences, *The Watchmaker's Daughter* (McWhitty Press), a memoir by Sonia Taitz, who summers in Amagansett, commands attention: "You could say that my father was a watchmaker by trade but that would be like saying that Nijinsky liked to dance. Fixing watches was

not only his livelihood but his life." Simon Taitz fixed watches in Dachau, a skill that saved him and that he also used to save others. The trade was what he carried with him when he came to America in 1949, a man with an indomitable will and, amazingly, an abiding faith in the God of his fathers. Against all odds, he built up a respected watch-repair business in what would be the Lincoln Center area and rebuilt it, yet again, after a robbery took everything he had. A hard, cynical, determined, practical man, he exerts from his beloved daughter a promise to always be true to her roots and to achieve. She willingly, lovingly, obliges.

Time rules in this memoir in multiple, often ironic ways: Sonia says she cannot remember early on having her own world, her own time frame. "I was born into my parents' world, the world of refugees, immigrants, survivors." She embraces this heritage, however, and does not feel it a burden. Her recollections of childhood years at a yeshiva constitute a rare look at a world that is often depicted as indifferent, even hostile, to questioning children, especially girls. But Sonia loves the history of her people, study, challenge. She also loves the American dream as she sees it in TV sit coms, the

movies, novels, comics (she's dark haired Veronica, alas, not Betty), books and music, and pursues this dream against the strictures of tradition, recounting her experiences with humor and self-criticism. She acknowledges that her beloved father could be violent, beating her on occasion and her brother more, her mother cowering and weeping at a remove. She sees Simon Taitz for the wounded God-like warrior he is—talented, troubled, fixed on her to achieve—his redemption. And she does achieve—in Hebrew School, at an upscale Jewish day school on the Upper West Side, at Barnard,

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Harvard, Yale and Oxford. At times she sees herself as Jules Feiffer might have enshrined her, a young, rebellious woman attracted to the "minor keys, the complex abnormalities" of life. Happiness, she says at one point, was for "losers and Lincoln Continental owners." When she's 21 she wonders if she should marry "this wonderful guy, who wants to go to law school (that, or medicine, being the only choices then for a smart Jewish boy), comes from a nice Jewish family, understands me and my world, went to a yeshiva like mine, and will almost certainly be good to me for the rest of my life." New paragraph: "Nah."

Though she senses that she has the right stuff to be a heroine, for America, Israel, the world, she does

not see the heroism of her mother. She trained to be a concert pianist before the Nazis rounded her up, along with her own mother, Gita. In America she is insular, bound to her kitchen and Yiddish ways, a woman whose concentration camp horrors make her seem more victim than survivor. She lives a life of sacrifice, bonding only with her son but not with Sonia, her independent second child who belongs to Simon. It will take a long time—but it does come—before Sonia realizes that she is not only her father's daughter, but her mother's as well.

*The Watchmaker's Daughter* is no all-too-familiar coming-of-age tale, however. Taitz, a prize-winning author as well as a lawyer, has an excellent eye and ear, and those who think they've been down this conflicted-children-of-survivors road will be pleasantly surprised. The memoir is unflinchingly honest, witty, and wonderfully evocative of New York culture, particularly Jewish American culture, in the last half of the 20th century. This is a wise and totally unsentimental book. It has no agenda, no indictments, no cathartic motive. It does, though, have a story to tell of extraordinary heart and insight, and you don't have to be Jewish to enjoy it.

