

GALLERY STROLL

'A slow-motion apocalypse'

Grotesquely charming mutants are artist's glimpse into the future.

'The Post Apocalyptic Tattoo'
Blue Star Contemporary
Art Center
116 Blue Star, (210) 227-6960
www.bluestarart.org
Through March 23

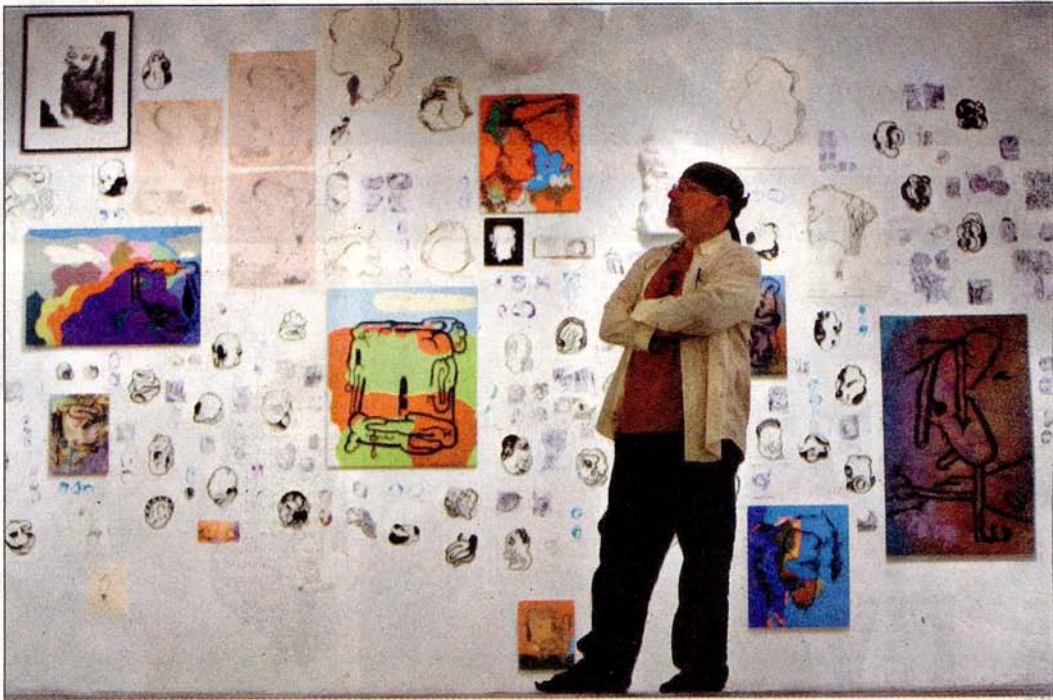
New York artist D. Dominick Lombardi said his 10-year survey show is "like walking around inside my head."

Tracing the development of an ongoing series of futuristic mutant characters, this show begins with Lombardi's doodles in his notebook in 1998 and then develops through drawings in charcoal and India ink, reverse Plexiglas paintings, silkscreen and woodcut prints, altered older canvases and plaster sculptures.

Reflecting his own fears about the future, he's created a grotesque cast of characters with various afflictions caused by pollution, transgenic mutation and other symptoms of the apocalypse.

They include Blue Boy, with viscera spilling down his leg; Twister, a torqued torso with rubbery bones; Exotic Dancer with Tumor, attached to one of her legs; Johnny Two-Heads, who collects shrunken heads; and Clown, who dies of an enlarged hair follicle on his tongue. Lombardi drew them to resemble tattoos, and they develop like characters in a comic book.

"This is a slow-motion apocalypse," Lombardi said. "Who said the apocalypse would happen quickly? I think we're in the middle of it right now. We don't know what the result of changing food on the molecular level is going to have many



WILLIAM LUTHER/STAFF

D. Dominick Lombardi with the exhibit of his work at the Blue Star Contemporary Art Center. The work is mounted chronologically so viewers can follow its development.

years from now. I call these reactive-automatic drawings. I let my subconscious guide me, but then try to develop the drawings into characters I can use."

Curator Carol Kino, a contributing editor for Art & Auction who also writes for the New York Times, forgoes the traditional, linear exhibit installation by allowing Lombardi's work to sprawl throughout the space from floor to ceiling, as if the artist's brainstorm has left a tornado track of debris splattered around the gallery. Though both are residents of New York, Kino and Lombardi first met in San Antonio at a Writers and Artists Exchange (known as WAX) sponsored by the Blue Star.

"This is the first time the

whole story has been told," Kino said. "I didn't think it would work as a straight installation. I wanted people to see what goes on inside an artist's brain."

The work is mounted chronologically so that you can follow the development of Lombardi's creation. Among the most painstaking are his paintings on Plexiglas, which have to be done in reverse. The finished image almost looks like an encaustic painting, although the smooth, flat surface of the Plexiglas is supposed to represent layers of skin embedded with a tattoo.

His series of ink drawings are the strongest graphic work, reducing the figures to simple, bold, curving lines. Lombardi said he has made more than

1,000 of these drawings.

He also took old paintings he did years ago and drew ink patterns on top, combining his tribal-like designs with landscapes. He's begun making plaster bas relief sculptures of the characters, building up layers of found objects to use as a support for the plaster, which he also mixes with acrylic for a surface that seems as smooth as plastic.

While grotesque, Lombardi's characters are oddly charming. Rather than doom and gloom, the show has a kind of goofy humor that permits the characters to be funny as well as appalling. But wandering through this artist's imagination, the future, instead of bright, looks more like blight.

— Dan R. Goddard