

T. H. Littlefield

# Fantasy Paintings

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By T.H. LITTLEFIELD

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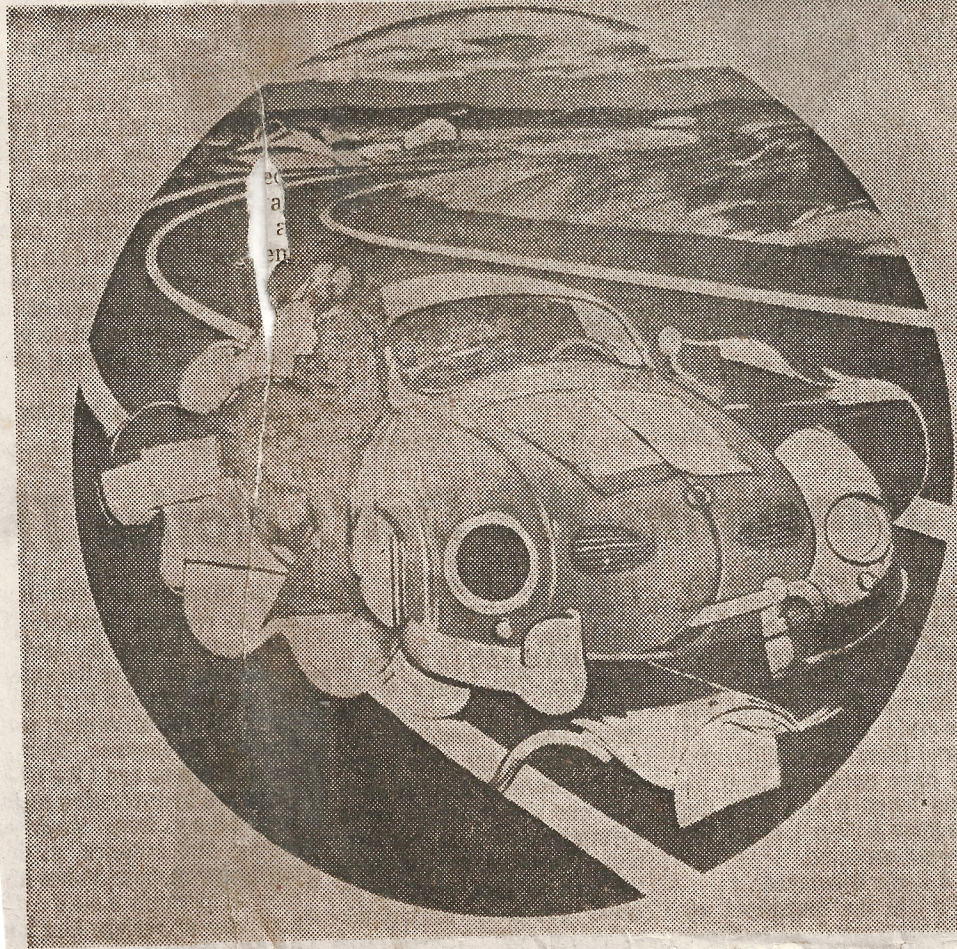
Harold Keller's fantasy paintings and Patty Kerr's pots and non-pots are being shown this month at the Campus Center of the State University. Though they occupy different spaces, Mrs. Kerr in the entrance gallery and Professor Keller in the "Patroon Lounge," and work in radically distinct media, it is instructive to think of the two artists together.

Keller, who is chairman of the art department at Fairleigh Dickinson University, paints as if with compass and straight edge in hand or at least filling his imagination. Half a dozen of the ten paintings shown are painted on round canvases, and in every picture landscape is abstracted into circles; rainbows and suns are presented as perfect hemispheres or spheres; circles evolve from various iconic forms.

Despite this cubist bias, or circle-ist bias, the paintings are bound in iconic forms in conventionally represented images. A vehicle or an aircraft in the Pop idiom appears in eight of the paintings; the Goddess of Love in various styles appears also in eight. Highways are lined with landscapes reminiscent of those that roll past the novice's vision in driver training machines. The sun and the rainbow, however circular, are iconic as well.

## Limits Palette . . .

Like a hard edge painter he limits his palette to a few clearly differentiated colors, applied conventionally as a map-maker might do to indicate grass, field, houses, or car paint. But the largest part of each painting is given in blacks and greys, after the manner of Guernica. Like a surrealist he transmutes his subjects to dream material by juxtaposing reality and fantasy.



KELLER'S 'BIRTH OF VENUS WITH KARMANN GHIA'

Apart from "Aeroplane" and "Helicopter," which are Pop comments on the air age, all the paintings are on the Birth of Venus theme. Her cockle-shell is represented variously as car wings, truck ears, a bed, or, as in Botticelli's painting, a boat. Venus is never Botticelli's Venus, but more like a naked Co-ed, except in "Birth of Venus #1," where she looks like Lazarus about to be raised, and in "Birth of Venus on Connecticut River," where she is like the Venus de Milo, set on a pedestal floating down the stream.

The idea is apparently to describe a kind of epiphany, and sure enough every time you react something the way Aeneas did when he ran into Venus (his mother) in the Libyan desert and remarked, "O quem te memorem, Virgo," or, as we put it, "Haven't I seen you somewhere before, baby?" she's a girl in a dream who shatters the perfunctory, the Pop world where cars and Mack trucks inhabit schematic highways, shatters even the perfunctoriness of the auto as symbol of casual sex as she bounds possessively from her shell into a Karmann Ghia, or as she kneels in her chrysalis as in a bath, on a New Jersey highway.

Round paintings are to oblong paintings as azimuthal equidistant projections are to Mercator projections. One of the effects of painting round is that of calling attention to the projective nature of flat surface pictorial art. The subject is in three dimensions, the picture two. The image is not the thing itself, nor is it meant to be, but an icon. But the meaning of an icon may expand into many dimensions, and so Keller's expand until they explode as the revelation of love to the modern world.