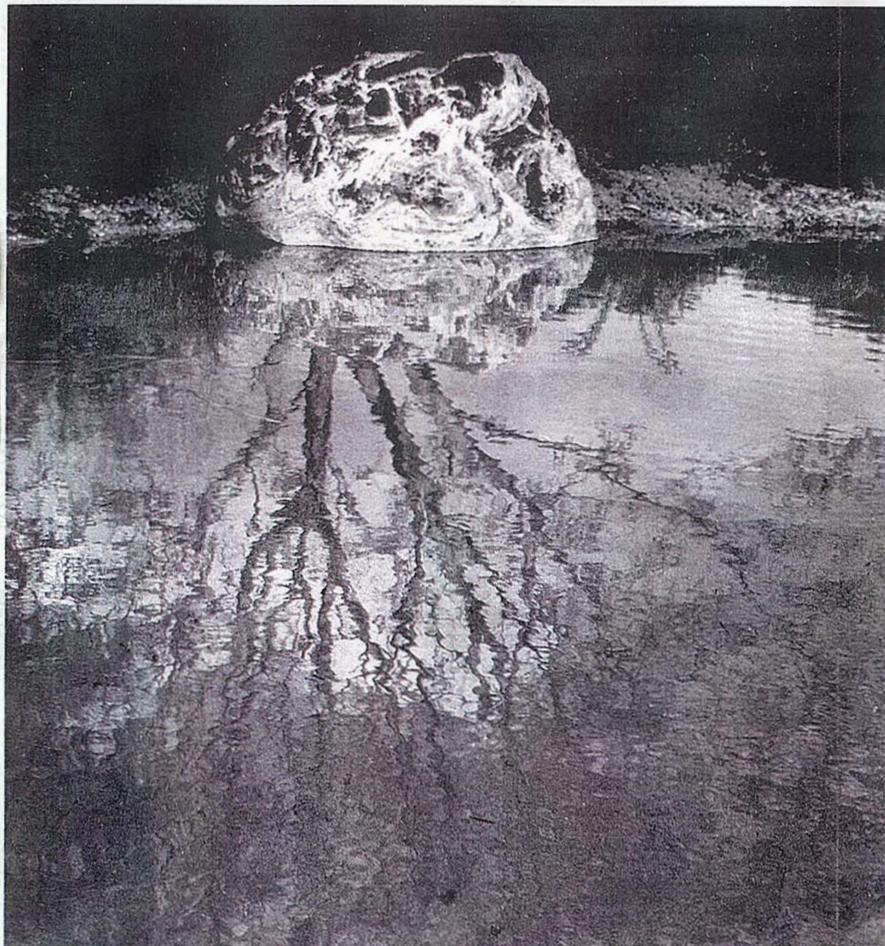


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Making Photographic Magic the Old-Fashioned Way

The New York Times



Renata Rainer's photograph "Magic Rock" is on view at Manhattanville College's Brownson Gallery. Ellen Eagle's pastel "Amy With Hands Clasped" is on display at Concordia Gallery of Concordia College.

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

PURCHASE

RENATA RAINER uses black-and-white film, a darkroom and negatives; she is an old-fashioned photographer in the digital age. But her results are as rich and inventive as anything created on a computer.

Ms. Rainer, who is having a retrospective at the Brownson Gallery at Manhattanville College, is well known in Westchester. She has taught in several institutions here, and in 1975 helped found the Ground Glass, an organization for Westchester photographers.

Most of the works on display here are images of nature. The exhibition, which encompasses the past 30

years, contains several straightforward photographs of natural subjects, including "Peyto Lake" (1978) in which the sharply contoured body of water is a brilliant, pure white that stands out in the darker landscape. "Lake Powell" (1990) is the opposite; in a bleached landscape the water is inky.

But Ms. Rainer is not interested in a direct expression of truth or in fidelity to nature. She says she is a picture maker not a picture taker. She relies heavily on photomontage, the juxtaposition of images made by overlapping negatives.

For example, in "The Palisades" (2003) three different images are combined, which makes the work look like a traditional collage. The pasting together of separate shots emphasizes the fractured nature of the imposing landform.

Ms. Rainer will occasionally give nature almost human attributes. In "Survivors" (1983), bare branches look like skeletons; in "Tree Forms" (1976) the branches resemble antique statuary in drapery with numerous folds. In "Rock Rhythm" (1978), the exaggerated but natural folds of layers of rock seem almost alive.

The Surrealists used photomontage with the aim of blending or juxtaposing disparate imagery. Ms. Rainer works some true surrealist magic in "Magic Rock" (1982), in which a large rock by water casts the reflection of a leafy tree, even though no tree is in sight. In "Sprouting Rock" (1998), a plant seems to emanate from the inside of a rock.

Born in Austria, Ms. Rainer immigrated to the United States at the beginning of World War II, and overall, an air of the old world characterizes her pictures. Two images from Prague feature dark monuments against a

foggy cityscape. Just the title, "Sailing to Byzantium" (1981), conveys a yearning for the past.

"Remembrance of Things Past" (1999) has the rudiments of a narrative. A man, whose back is to the viewer, fades into curtains. The room he's in overlooks the sea, a potent symbol of being carried back in time.

Emphasis on Emotion

BRONXVILLE

The art gallery at Concordia College here is featuring 15 works by Ellen Eagle, who paints portraits in pastel in her studio in Glen Ridge, N.J. Ms. Eagle had her first solo exhibition in a New York City gallery in 2002; the portraits on display here date from 1998 to 2003.

The tone of the show is set by the first portrait, "Mercedes With Hands in Lap" (2002). The subject was tired when she came to Ms. Eagle's studio, and chose to close her eyes when her portrait was made. The emotions evoked by the image feel true to life.

In the earlier portraits, like "Harry" (1998), the subject is surrounded by plenty of space. All the backgrounds are gray or a neutral sea green. But in later pieces, the figures seem more important, set in niche-like formats. "Amy With Hands Clasped" (1998) signals the beginning of the artist's interest in self-containment.

Two works, both from 2002, are not portraits. "Peter's Grandfather's Camera" depicts an old box camera; the lens in the center is like an eye looking at the viewer. "The Elements of Portraiture" is a little chilling, but also droll. A skeleton, certainly basic to portraiture, is being caressed under the chin by a female hand.

Ms. Eagle attended the Art Students League and the National Academy of Design, a common path for academic artists. For most, the priority is getting the image to look right. Ms. Eagle values accuracy, but values feeling just as much.

"Photo Retrospective: Renata Rainer" is at the Brownson Gallery, Manhattanville College, 2900 Purchase Street, through Oct. 30. Information: (914) 323-5331. "Ellen Eagle: Portraits in Pastel" is at Concordia Gallery, Concordia College, 171 White Plains Road, Bronxville, through Tuesday. Information: (914) 337-9300, extension 2185.

