

Jean Lowe at Bodi Modern Art Gallery
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Review by Michael Cochran

What? An exciting new gallery showing engaging contemporary in Newport, Rhode Island? Are you kidding? Yes, believe it or not, it's true.

Last December, Bodi Lukasewych, a Belgian-born, recently transplanted New Yorker and Tony Gill, a local artist and gallery owner, opened Bodi Modern Art Gallery. Located in a small street level storefront on Franklin Street (Newport's antique row), the all-white, low-ceilinged gallery reminds one of the many small galleries that proliferated New York's East Village in the 1980's and early 90's. Bodi, as he likes to be called, refers to his gallery as "a New York gallery in Newport" and his inaugural show was of East Village artists from that era.

Since the gallery opened he has shown several Newport artists but the current exhibition is the work of Jean Lowe, a San Diego-based painter who has transformed the entire gallery into a home environment full of domestic irony and social criticism. Each room is a tableau complete with papier-mache enhanced furniture and even a painted canvas imitation carpet. "Yes," the artist says, "it's okay to walk on the art."

On a back room wall is a series of plates which Lowe titles, "Delft Landscapes" which while painted with white enamel and beautiful gold leaf mock the usual sweet Dutch pastoral scenes by inserting housing tracts and four-lane highways in the center of the plates. In "Sienna Estates," a large (60 ½" X 95") oil on canvas documents the destruction of rural landscapes as real estate developers carve out new housing developments. The painting hangs directly on the wall with grommets and nails instead of stretched on a stretcher bar and like her other paintings is "framed" in a trompe l'oeil Rococo style frame.

Lowe seems to be more interested in the viewer "reading" rather than just viewing the images, deciphering the paradoxes and ironies of the contrasts of images and titles. Unlike the photorealist painters whose emphasis is technique but usually lacking content, Lowe's loose but controlled painting manner focuses the viewer on the painting's content and not a meticulous style or technique. She effectively dismantles pretense and exposes the hypocrisies of vanity and the exploitation of animals and the environment.

The work is satirical and humorous yet clear and poignant. It's exciting to see an artist who knows what she wants to convey and has developed the means to communicate her message. Bodi Modern Art is off to a great start. New England is fortunate indeed to have this new gallery.