

EVERY PICTURE . . .

. . . tells a story



Jay Solmonson — staff photos

Valerie Patten's "Madame Katherine's Wishful Thinking" was inspired by an actual fortune teller.

By Beth Jensen
Staff writer

If you thought most art meant a painting, photo or piece of sculpture that captured a motionless moment in time, you haven't heard about narrative art.

Narrative art isolates a split second in the midst of an event — a scene that leads the viewer to question just what circumstances may have led to this moment, and what events will follow.

Narrative art is the theme of the exhibit now at the Olive Hyde Art Gallery in Mission San Jose. The display showcases the work of three artists: painter Valerie Patten of Menlo Park; painter and printmaker Roberta Loach of Los Altos and ceramicist Coille Hooven of Berkeley.

Their art forms have a subtle, yet significant difference from non-narrative art. "The kind of art you see (in many shows) are pictures of a static event — here are trees, a barn, a landscape. It could be anytime — tomorrow, the next day, a thousand years from now," said Tonia Macneil, director of the visual arts program for Fremont's Community Services Department. "It's a fixed reality. Most art . . . is just what it is.

"Narrative art is part of a story," she continued. "You can

imagine something happening before the people got into that situation.

Included in the exhibit is a series of small, brightly colored gouache paintings and etchings by Ms. Loach. Often dominated by grotesque faces, they encompass such diverse topics as a modern-day flea market, variations on "Hansel and Gretel" and ancient myth.

Ms. Hooven's fantastical white and blue porcelain figures depict tiny animal and man-like creatures frolicking on articles of clothing. Tiny dragons romp on pillows and blue jeans, while others sit atop slippers and sneakers equipped with ears. They are the stuff of myth and dreams.

A third exhibit by Ms. Patten consists of large paintings of domestic scenes with a twist — each is done in vibrant, often unrealistic hues and includes distorted scenes and images. The artist said she strives to create a work that is at once simple yet extremely visual, thought-provoking and humorous.

"I guess it's simple in the sense there's a story going on," Ms. Patten said. "They are about someone's life or an event, but I try to keep it a visual story, and a little mysterious. Most have an underlying concern with the human condition."

Her subjects vary — in one, a woman at home sips a martini



The weary boredom of this couple is the subject of Roberta Loach's "Ennui."

which spouts a blue flame. In a piece entitled "The Floozy Next Door," a young housewife watches with disdain as her somewhat sleazy neighbor walks by. "The Alien Arrives, Finally," features a barefoot man in the company of a futuristic woman with a 1950s-style beehive hairdo.

"I try to see things from all different sides," Ms. Patten said. "These are all things I've had some experience with or seen

with my friends.

"I really enjoy it when people come up with these complicated stories (about a painting)," she said with a laugh. "I'm hoping to create some concern with the viewer."

The narrative art will be on exhibit through July 22. The Olive Hyde Gallery is located at Mission and Niles boulevards, and is open Wednesday through Sunday from 1-4 p.m.