

REVIEW

Successful variations on a theme in Oak Park

Fine exhibition features Grigely and Bernard

By Alan G. Artner
Tribune art critic

The traditional way of writing musical variations is to state the theme first so a listener knows what's being varied. But occasionally composers have worked the other way around, with variations leading *toward* the theme, which is sounded only at the end of the experience.

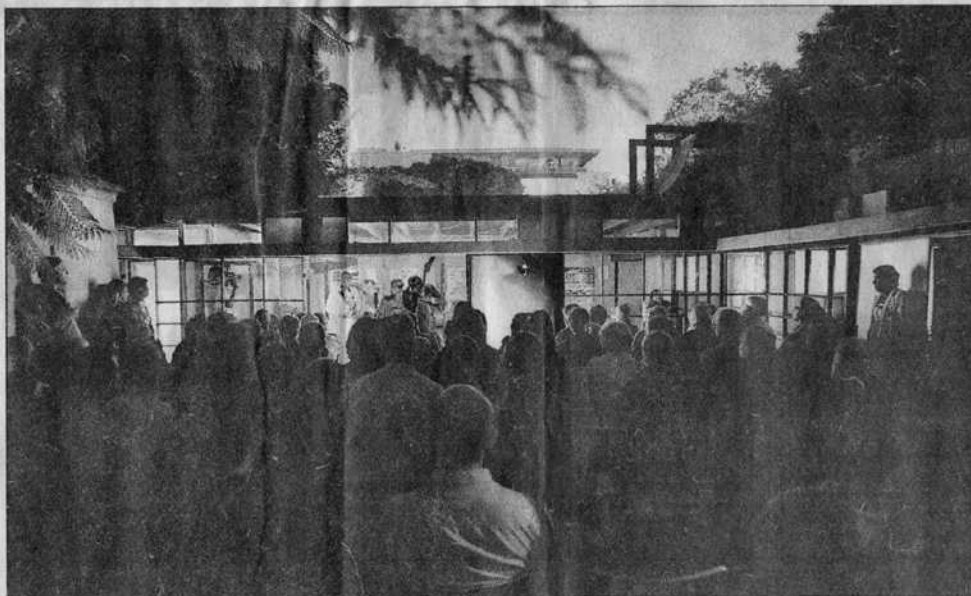
In effect, that's what happens with the two small exhibitions featuring **Joseph Grigely** and **Cindy Bernard** at The Suburban, and the way in which the theme of the shows emerges turns out to be singularly appropriate to the nature of the work.

Grigely, 48, has been creating text-based installations and mixed-media works for a decade. Many of them have included scraps of paper the artist, who became deaf at age 10, employs to converse with people who do not know sign language.

"White Noise," shown three years ago at the Whitney Museum of American Art, was the largest of his pieces, an entire room papered with 2,500 scraps. Now, at the Suburban, he may have produced his smallest installation, by bringing together two pieces.

"Blueberry Surprise" is a 70-by-52-inch print on which the artist has reproduced fragments of conversations in different colored letters. One color is used for each utterance; not all are complete sentences. The colors run: black, red, orange, then repeat in the same order. The total number of words on the sheet is 45,000.

In the same space is a painted fiberglass sculpture. It's of a life-sized dog painted white to look like plaster. The fur also looks like the strokes of a paintbrush, which is a clue to the source of the creature, "The Arch of Septimus



Cindy Bernard gives us this view of a concert scene from 2003, part of her show that co-exists with and speaks to the work of other artists exhibiting in the same gallery space.

Severus," a picture by Canaletto, the 18th Century artist known for views of Venice.

Grigely has for some time been engaged with the dogs in Canaletto paintings. This one has its front legs bent, back legs extended, tail curled over the body and head crooked to the left. It's a posture of vigilance.

How does the sculpture relate to the print? That comes clear only after seeing the second exhibition.

Bernard is a photographer who also organizes experimental music events in Los Angeles. Some of her color photographs are related to the events she organizes. Others are part of a recent taxonomy of band shells in the American Midwest.

Her exhibition, too, has only two pieces. One is based on a document of a 2003 performance in which Joseph Jarman, a member of the Jazz Ensemble of Chicago, played with colleagues at the famous Schindler House. The other is of a stage and empty seats in a Los Angeles veteran's hall that has been prepared for a concert in 2001.

Both images are shot from a distance. The 2003 concert is shown in a composite Bernard

created to give equal weight to audience, musicians and architecture. The 2001 stage preparations are pictured in a more orthodox architectural study, though a single figure performs some indecipherable action at the side of the picture.

As with Grigely, Bernard has a relation to earlier painting: She scales all her images to the size of Edouard Manet's canvas, "Music in the Tuileries Gardens," which in turn clues us in to the important parallel regarding sound. Bernard, like Grigely, attempts to make a certain kind of sound, or its absence, visible. The theme that runs through both shows is, in a variation of Grigely's words, speech or music through sight, and it's delicately, beautifully handled.

Counterpoint from Boom gallery (at the same address) is a solo exhibition made up of a video, painting and drawings by **Pete Fagundo**, a Chicago artist prompted by questions from his young son to explore irreducible principles.

His short video attempts to give the essence of autobiographical Saturday mornings through three similar shapes. A painting of receding rectangles, one inside the other, has been made from repeating the three primary colors. A suite of 52 drawings expands Fagundo's repertory of basic shapes but presents them again through the primaries plus black.

I like this quirky minimalism, which proves at once playful, severe, demanding, icy and human. Seeming naivete disguises sophistication. Fagundo traces the path of early abstract artists, simplification preceding evacuation. What's left are the things this artist can absolutely not do without.

At 244 Lake St., Oak Park, through March 27.
708-763-8554.