

Contemporary art showcased at Mira Mar

BY THYRZA JACOCKS

At this time in downtown Sarasota there remains, despite a long history, only one gallery of serious contemporary art. Not art that is partially gift shop or appeals to more glamorous inclinations, but art that is real for our time, that fits precisely the dictionary definition of fine art as "something requiring highly developed techniques and skills."

Art here and now in the downtown arts district doesn't get any better than Allyn Gallup's Contemporary Gallery Mira Mar. Long a staple in a town of hybrid and high-bred ideas, this small Palm Avenue enterprise is, uncontested, the only game in town where contemporary art consistently captures and holds your attention.

Admittedly, in Sarasota, artistic maturity has moved in mysterious ways. More than a decade ago when Gallup arrived fresh from a New York banking background, there had been a number of serious galleries thriving. A decade before, Marcia and Michael Corbino on Palm Avenue (later Main Street and now on Longboat) showed nationally recognized artists Helen Sawyer and Jon Corbino. The original Joan Hodgell fashioned her passion for clay and modern American glass; Ruth Katzman offered museum-quality contemporary craftwork on lower Main Street; Joan Adley on upper Main represented abstract expressionist Syd Solomon. Contemporary art always reflects the moment.

Allyn Gallup levels his gaze saying, "My father was a classicist in art and music. He

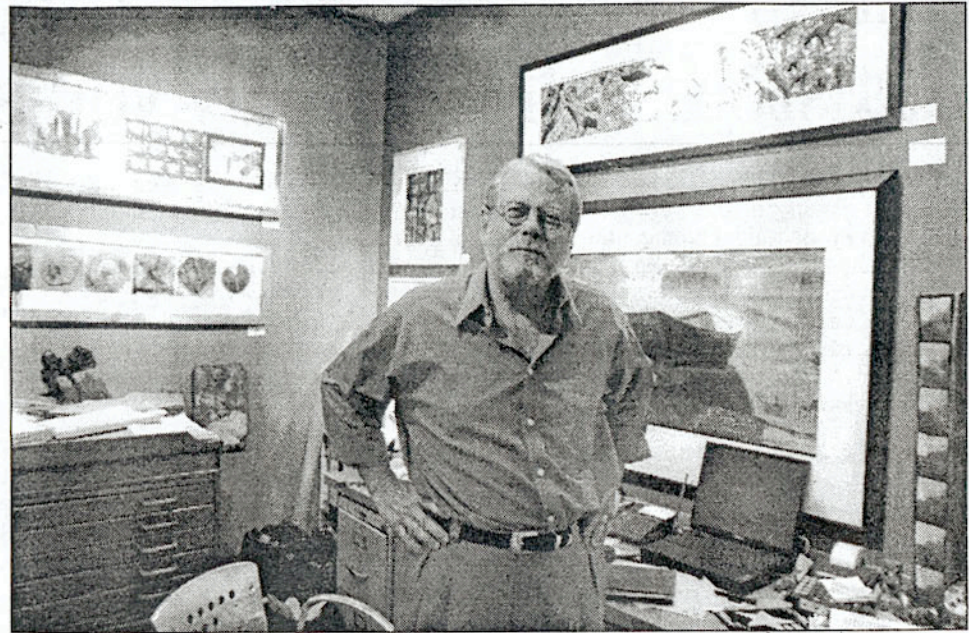
collected American print makers," in response to a question about the origins of his great, unvarnished love for contemporary works. He speaks with a thrust to the words, a vitality that instantly alerts the ears of the listener to a sense that there is more to come, much more.

Art is the center of the Gallup universe, the thing that causes his eyes to illuminate. Sometimes it causes him to rhapsodize. Sometimes to send a flow of clippings to friends and acquaintances, sometimes an exuberant almost-speech erupts on a specific artist.

Whatever the response, it is because he pays close attention to the world that gives birth to art. Like a tidy curator, he comprehends why specific art is universal, global, with no attachment to trends or pageantry.

Allyn Gallup believes deeply and passionately in the principal work of his life: bringing people and art together. "The idea is to let people stretch their ideas a little bit into contemporary art ... not be intimidated by it," he says with a playfulness to his provocation. "What makes art collecting fun is finding out what makes it and what doesn't."

He laughs. Caught in the sway of his own personal ideas he can sometimes exhibit a prickly forthrightness, making this interviewer think of Walt Whitman's dictum "resist much, obey little." He takes real delight in the client who finds his own way, his own taste, the seeker finding a satisfying imagery, implying a degree of sophistication. That person is the one who



REBECCA WILD BAXTER

Allyn Gallup revels in a buyer in his contemporary gallery who can find his or her own way and own taste.

browses, looks and enjoys the looking — the one Allyn Gallup most relishes finding frequenting his gallery space.

In addition to the gallery he has contributed to Sarasota by serving on the boards of directors of the Sarasota County Arts Council (1993-99), the County Art In Public Places Committee ('97), Sarasota Visual Arts Center ('97-99) and as current president of the Ringling Museum Members Council.

Traditionally, art has been the impetus for changing ideas. In the past 25 years

contemporary art has reinforced that role, and the sole contemporary art provocateur in downtown Sarasota likes and comprehends that, which is one of the reasons why his is the remaining contemporary gallery held in regard by the serious art world.

▼ Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art/Mira Mar Gallery, 1284 N. Palm Ave. Currently exhibiting the powerful and superb figurative paintings of Lynn Davison through March 2, 2002.