

Style

C2 SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1995 ...

Galleries

The Season's Treats

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Giving art for Hanukah or Christmas is tricky business. All too often that small abstract oil painting, a reasonably priced work you were sure Aunt Opal would love, gets a frosty greeting when the wrapping is removed.

"How *interesting*," she'll say, looking as if a gastrointestinal crisis has just erupted. "Isn't that . . . *unusual*." Just think how many paintings end up in attics, closets and Salvation Army stores.

Message: If you are planning to surprise a loved one with art, think again. It's a better idea to prowl the holiday shows currently running at a number of local galleries with your special person and watching to see which painting, sculpture or print lights a tree. Then all you have to do is pay for it.

The art may not be cheap. But look what you get for the money—something genuinely unique, a statement of individual taste defying the mind-numbing sameness of catalogue culture. Cool.

So carpe the holidiem. The supply side of the art-as-gift equation is particularly well stocked in Washington these days. Several galleries have opened new exhibitions over the past week; two of the best are group shows by area artists: "Drawing on Washington," at Marsha Mateyka Gallery, 2012 R St. NW, and "Small is Beautiful," next door at Gallery K, 2010 R St. NW.

At Gallery K, owner Komei Wachi has put together his ninth annual show of small works by the gallery's artists and their friends. The two floors are packed with 122 pieces by 57 artists, including Wayne Edson Bryan, Jo Rango, Mary LaRue Wells, Franklin White and Susan Firestone. Their art spans the spectrum of media, style and taste, ranging in price from \$200 to \$3,500.

It is an eclectic, quirky exhibition, with a Medusa of its own. This one is by 65-year-old Robert Nelson of Lancaster, Pa., who lived and taught in Washington for years. His Medusa is a cast-bronze, metal and wood sculpture that gives a chilling cyber-techno-punk treatment to its mythic subject.

On the realistic end of the spectrum is Joey P. Manlapaz's brightly colored oil on canvas "Little Tavern Georgetown" (1993), showing the landmark restaurant that claims to be "the aristocrat of beef" shimmering in the summer sun.