

Wilson, William, "Looking in on Diversity in Three Acts," Los Angeles Times, Sunday Calendar, (May 22, 1983), p 89, illus.

The Municipal Art Gallery in Barnsdale Park goes about its likable business of acting as a handsome forum for L.A. artists whose recognition tends to lag behind their accomplishment. Through next Sunday the fare includes paintings, drawings and documents by John White, whose art leans to complexity.

John White's exhibition makes him look primarily like an abstract painter and draftsman, but he is also known as a performance artist whose work has been influenced by such disparate activities as working as a psychological therapist in hospital and having a non-bohemian passion for the game of golf.

When you get right down to it, there is nothing all that unusual about an artist taking a non-aesthetic job to pay the rent or having a bourgeois avocation.

White is unusual in that his other activities are brought to bear to explain his art. At a glance his drawings and paintings are simply rather handsome abstractions. A few seconds of looking makes one realize they might also be read as aerial map or diagrams. Titles and marginal notations guide viewers to see incredibly complex plans and schemes made by one of those standard comic-strip characters whose golfing has made a widow of his wife.

Drawings are alive with mad flurries of squiggles, arcs, angles and marks that suggest the obsessive golfer trying to over calculate his next shot by measuring random factors that can't be controlled.

In two versions of "Westchester Golf Course Diagram," a central motif of a triangular path reads both as the perspective of a fairway and as a magisterial mountain. An element of deified nature is added to the amusement of imagining the golfer finding a private metaphysic on the links.

Some of White's best work seems to result from accepting the randomness and absurdity that must attach to the idea of a grown person using all the craft and intelligence to hit a tiny white ball with a tick to make it go into a miniscule hole hundreds of yards distant. Some of that serious wackiness gets into the re-creation of a wall installation White made at the County Museum of Art. Using wooden molding, dowel and masking tape, he brings us with a pile of sand and a wan little brush to a point that seems to say something of oblique about the sand traps of life.

The most impressive work here is a wall-filling installation where broken pieces of glass edged with silver or red tape are arranged on a black field. When we accept all its implications, it has an easy, colloquial urbanity that is typically knowledgeable, entertaining and dramatic.

At the same time, allowing golf, performance, psychology or anything else to completely color our perception of a work of art is an act of self-hypnosis or simply falling into the old trap of being so impressed with the subject matter of a narrative picture that we neglect to actually look at it.

John White's art by no means falls apart when scrutinized, but it does appear notably busy, nervous and impersonal. The notion of Conceptualism that seems to help

Houston to clarity complicates White's art to its detriment and leaves us wondering how he would make out with his evident talent minus all the fancy work.