

Sunday Bulletin
May 28 1967

Artist's Suicide Gives Tragic Overtone to Exhibit

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Bulletin Art Critic

On the Thursday before the 12.10 A. M. opening May 15 of a four-man show at the Socrates Perakis Gallery, 2116 Locust st. (billed under the tongue-in-cheek name of "The Society for the Commemoration of Festivals and Fetishes"), James Brewton, one of the four exhibitors, committed suicide in his home at 718 P e m b e r t o n s t . , where his 14-year-old stepson heard a shot and found the body in the third-floor studio.

Brewton, born in Toledo, O., in 1930, had struggled for a livelihood for years after his graduation from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, although in 1960 he had won the Schiedt Memorial Prize in an Academy Annual for an oil painting which the jury described as being "of special importance." The title was, ironically, "Suicide of Judas."

Brewton's own suicide throws into sharp relief the problem of the talented young artist who must live through the let-down years after art school on inadequate funds.

When weighed against the tragedy, his work (on view at Socrates Perakis to June 7), like that of too many other young artists in their late 20's and 30's—points to mental and emotional disturbance bred by world and personal pressures, which, though they may be taken in stride by the less sensitive among us, prove fatal to others. Brewton was among the "others."

At the Socrates Perakis Gallery, works of art co-exhibited with Brewton's are

those of Thomas Chimes, Jim McWilliams (of the Philadelphia College of Art faculty) and sculptor Paul Anthony Greenwood.

Most theatrical of the four is McWilliams, top art showman, who was responsible for the setting of the much publicized Philadelphia Arts Festival feature, "Merchandise Museum," sponsored by the Arts Council of the YMWHA in that institution's gallery through June 2.

There is a hint of sadism in his "Prints to Walk On," with heads and figures placed on the floor under transparencies. Even if you don't shy away from trampling a work of art, you may feel a bit squeamish about putting your foot on a human face.

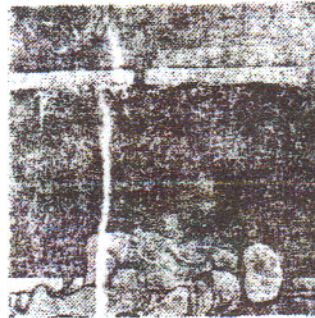
But the most tongue-in-cheek of the McWilliams' pieces is "Black Super Tubes," a pile-up of tires topped by a plastic head mask, and bearing the legend: "This piece is complete when artist or person wearing mask of artist is inside the six tubes." And that is where the artist stood on opening night.

Repulsively attention-getting is his "Polyrathene Book," a series of seven black book shapes oozing discolored white plastics, his comment, no doubt, on the literary content.

Sculptor Greenwood is represented by one piece only—a huge polychrome "Odalisque" shown earlier this season in the Peale House galleries of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Differing from his colleagues in his poetic rather than spectacular handling of subject and materials is Thomas Chimes, presently enamored of metal boxed images and bits and pieces hand-made by the artist.

Haunting the show is Brewton's suicide which may be symptomatic of an un-



"Suicide of Judas," by James Brewton, won the Schiedt Memorial Prize in 1960. Early this month, Brewton himself committed suicide. Several of his works are on view at the Socrates Perakis Gallery.

healthy condition in the art of our day.

"We feel," says Harry Kul-kowitz, director of Kenmore Galleries, "that Jim was one of the great talents to emerge from Philadelphia art institutions (The P.A.F.A.), and his death may be attributed in great measure to the lack of encouragement and subsidy for artists like him.

"We hope in the near future, with the help of other galleries, to set up an exhibition of his work, proceeds from which would go toward a scholarship fund for other artists."

Anyone knowing the location of a work by Brewton should communicate immediately with Director Kul-kowitz, Kenmore Galleries, 122 S. 18th st.

Note: Brewton's "Suicide of Judas" is now the property of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.)



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James Brewton, Posthumously

JAMES E. BREWTON, a painter, died May 12 of a self-inflicted gunshot wound shortly before the opening of an exhibit of his work at Socrates Perakis Gallery on Locust st. He was 36 years old. The four-man exhibition started on schedule and will continue until June 7.

Mr. Brewton's career was launched dramatically when his canvas "The Suicide of Judas" won the prestigious \$1000 Schiedt prize in the national biennial exhibition of American painting and sculpture jointly sponsored by the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts during the 1959-60 season. The tall ex-marine sergeant, a veteran of the Korean war, thus captured—at the very early age of 28—the same award William Glackens, Stuart Davis, Hans Hofmann, Ivan Albright and Charles Burchfield had earned in their maturity. Eight years and several one-man shows later, Mr. Brewton, despite a modest but steady following, a successful solo in Copenhagen, and the interest that certain museum curators already have shown in his graphics, was still searching for the second and, for him, much more elusive breakthrough. It did not come in time.

Paradoxically a gentle person who earned his reputation by making strong pictorial statements, the expressionist painter was born in Toledo, Ohio, studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Ruskin School at Oxford University, England. His work, slightly reminiscent of Asger Jorn, is now widely dispersed in several public and numerous private collections—a circumstance that prompts Kenmore Galleries to seek collectors' help in locating oils, mixed-media subjects and prints for their forthcoming memorial show.

Surviving Mr. Brewton are his widow, Anne, and a daughter of an earlier marriage.