

Goldman's Holocaust series deserves recognition

By B. J. Foreman

Stewart Goldman, professor of art at the Art Academy, is having his first one-man show here at home in three years. It's at the Toni Birkhead Gallery, and not only is it a beauty of a show, it is one of the most significant groups of work around.

The exhibit is divided into two groups—drawings and paintings. The back gallery is hung with pastel drawings of nudes, a subject Goldman has been exploring for a few years now. A while back, he used hatching in colored pencil to indicate form. These had the look of things seen through a prism—all multicolored around the edges.

THE CURRENT group defines form with color, too, but it is far bolder, as well as more arbitrary. A shadow may fall on the model's body, but it is indicated by a colored area superimposed in an abstract way on both the model and the surrounding environment.

The gestures in these works are larger, almost presences in and of themselves. Sometimes the swashes of color fairly jump off the figure and fly about under their own power.

ALSO IN the category of drawings, but hung rightfully in a transitional position between Birkhead's two galleries, are two pieces dealing with a single interior—a room with a couch.

These represent a successful exploration of fresh subject matter for Goldman, who has shown mainly figural works



Stewart Goldman's 'Chamber 3'

along Balthusian lines in the last few years.

The interior scenes explore the balance between Goldman's terse black line and the indulgences of light and color. Goldman has titled them "March Series," and, where one is dominated by the yellow hues of morning light, the other is evening-ish, with lilacs casting a cool look on the scene.

The couch undergoes transformations, too. It is sketchily rendered, with decorative red stripes in the morning one, as-

serting its identity as an object. For the evening trope, the couch becomes a mere color foil for the blue shadow cast on it. These are quiet, beautiful pieces that make one want to see the rest of this series, which is sizeable, according to the artist.

THE REAL MEAT in this exhibit, however, is the suite of six paintings that compose an homage to the Holocaust. It is not the usual blatant or angry treatment of this subject; most people, in fact, missed the point of the paintings at last week's

opening—testimony to the series' strength on purely formal grounds.

Each painting depicts a "chamber," as in gas chamber or torture chamber, of the variety found in the death camps of Nazi Germany during World War II. When seen in sequence, they form a narrative of subtle terror, but Birkhead's hanging of the show confuses this somewhat. It's best to refer to the guide in the gallery so that you see them in order.

LIGHT IS a major characteristic in this series, as it seems to be in all Goldman's work. Like Rembrandt's yellow light of divinity, Goldman uses an orange light as an embodiment of the atrocity of the Holocaust. It glows with an obscene heat suggesting burning flesh, or the heat of hatred.

Sometimes the light is cool violet, a dissecting, grim kind of light. He plays different light sources against one another, as he pits illusionistic space against more believable pictorial components. There's a delicate balance that is carefully thought out in so many aspects.

The impact of the work hovers between the atrocity of the ideas and the beauty with which they are depicted. The build-up of layers of glazes makes for sensuous and virtuosic passages of brushwork.

Goldman's imagery of stairs as a recurring road to destiny and of the ladder leading nowhere isn't overpowering. This is a suitable treatment of symbolism for the subject matter, especially given the bizarre facts and the workaday way in which they were carried out.

I HOPE this series gets the attention it deserves. It deserves to take its place alongside Picasso's "Guernica," or Motherwell's "Elegy," or Goya's "Horrors of War." In today's artistic atmosphere, in which heavy-handed, visceral imagery often predominates, these paintings are a pleasure for their subtlety, as

well as for their artistic discipline.

Why, you may ask, would Stewart Goldman choose to deal with this subject, which is recalled with such vividness in photographs from the time? The answer lies in the fact that this is art, not photojournalism—the expression of one man's feelings.

Stewart Goldman's show runs through July 10 at the Birkhead Gallery, 342 W. Fourth St., 241-0212, open 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, noon-4 p.m. Saturday.

B. J. Foreman is art critic for The Post.