

By Kathleen Alaks
of the Daily Courier

Define reality and give three examples. Given such a task, the scholar will argue that to define is to confine and that it can't be done.

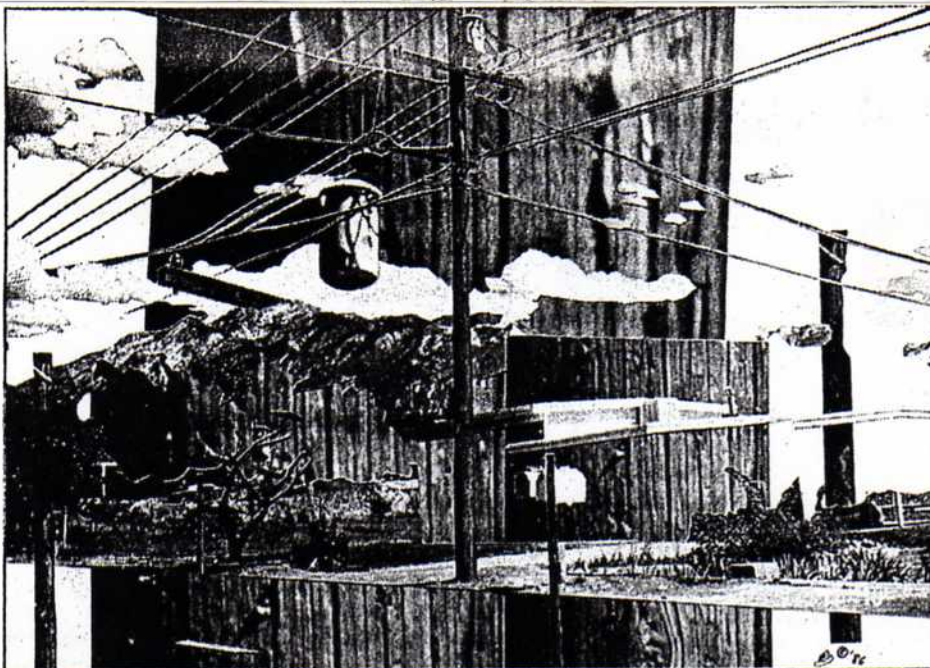
The philosopher will counter that reality doesn't even exist.

The artist will ask, why only three examples?

Such is the infinite challenge — and the irresistible thrill — of art: to reconstruct reality, to allow room for a new vision, a new way of seeing things, a new way of identifying and defining the norm.

And such is the aim of two western artists now showing their works at the Grants Pass Museum of Art:

Karen Guzak, a painter and printmaker from Seattle, Wash., and Les Barta, a self-taught artist from Incline Village, Nev., will be contrasting their individual views of reality in an exhibit that runs through June 4.



The photographic collages of Les Barta force their reality upon the viewer.

The photographic constructions by Les Barta are less approachable, though still compelling. These collages challenge the viewer to question preconceived notions of reality and to push those notions to the edge.

Each piece is based on reconstructing

the imagery of a single view. They are made from a single photograph of a single scene. Barta then scans the images into a computer where he manipulates them, rearranging the scene using all the parts as abstract structures in a photographic collage.

In this way, by serving up a rearranged and realigned reality, Barta attempts to alter the way the viewer reads and defines reality.

The problem for this reviewer, however, is that, while Barta invites us to question reality, he leaves little room for answers. Just as he has snipped, edited, rearranged and fragmented the images, so he manipulates the

viewer's perceptions and leaves us to accept his version without stimulating our own. The reality here is all Barta's.

Nonetheless, his technique is compelling. The images are evocative and teasing if somewhat elusive. He uses positive and negative space well and many of the pieces are well constructed.

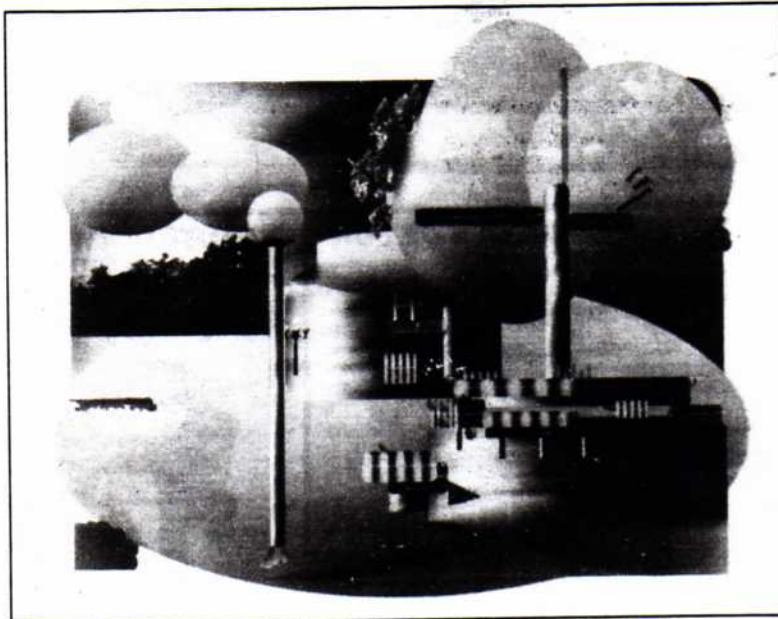
Take "Bike Rider," a nice pyramidal composition of a lone cyclist on the road. Barta gives us all the elements — the pumping, sneakered feet, the hands on the handlebar, the billed cap, frayed and ragged tires, and images of the landscape layered over and around the rider. The viewer gets a feel for the experience of the ride itself, the motion and emotion of the experience, which has been pared down to its essence.

'Photos as Altered Image' at the Pence

◆ Artists Barta and Michaud use computers, Xerox technology to create poetic forms

Photography serves as the base for art on exhibit this month at the Pence Gallery, 212 D St. in downtown Davis. Community members are invited to an opening reception in honor of the artists, Les Barta and Elaine Michaud, on Friday from 7 to 9 p.m. The exhibition, "Photos as Altered Image," opens Saturday and runs through Dec. 9.

The use of photography as an art form is no longer in question, says Nancy Servis, executive director of the Pence Gallery. Throughout the 20th century artists have brought the medium from its 19th century technological roots to a level of expression where form, landscape, movement and beauty are artistically portrayed.



Davis
Enterprise
Nov. 12, 1994

'Nut Forest' is the title of this 18-by-20-inch computer photoconstruction by Les Barta, a self-taught artist from Incline Village, Nev.

Courtesy photo

More recently, artists like Barta and Michaud have disassembled the photographic image to create a new reality in collage or assemblage, Servis says.

Barta, a self-taught artist from Incline Village, Nev., recreates his local landscape with the use of the computer. After cutting and rearranging his color photographs of the Sierra Nevada region he then scans their likenesses into a computer and transfigures their arrangement.

The resulting works allude to cubist interpretation through their fracturing and restructuring of elements, Servis says.

According to the artist, his rebuilding of imagery undermines the fixed meaning of things that he considers as arbitrary. Through restructuring he derives what he describes as a "strategic almost algebraic — visual poetry," Servis reports.