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MUSEUMS

Art Studies Without the Homework

At College Galleries, Forget Tuition: There's Usually Not Even an Admission Fee



Photographs by Thomas McDonald for The New York Times

Works by Suzan Shutan at the Gallery of Contemporary Art, left, at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield. "King Philip," a 1922 painting by Thomas Hart Benton, at the St. Joseph College Art Gallery in West Hartford.

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

COLLEGE campuses can be good neighbors. At their best they are cultural beacons in the suburbs, a place where the arts flourish in communities that otherwise may not be able to support them.

The visual arts are a prime example. There are more than two dozen galleries and museums tucked away on campuses in the New York suburbs. They are a varied lot, characterized partly by the wealth of the school and the generosity of alumni and partly by the kind of art they display.

But they also have some things in common. They typically charge no admission, and they are open not only to students but also to canny suburban art lovers. In a pay-as-you-go society, that's a real boon.

My favorite spaces are some of the smaller, lesser known galleries, where you'll often find terrific project-based exhibitions by younger contemporary artists, or thoughtful historical shows. These places often anticipate broader art trends.

Since some campus museums close for the summer or reduce hours, it is always best to call ahead.

Connecticut

ST. JOSEPH COLLEGE One of the liveliest campus museums in the state, the St. Jo-

seph College Art Gallery houses a remarkable collection of more than 1,700 objects, with its core holdings in 19th- and early 20th-century American painting and drawing. In addition to a display of the permanent collection, the gallery presents regular loan exhibitions of historical, modern and contemporary art.

Through June 4, it is showing new work by Richard Yarde, an acclaimed experimental watercolorist and professor of art at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His work is patterned and often large scale, making frequent reference to children's games and folk tales.

SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY Opened in 1989, the pint-size Gallery of Contemporary Art (about 800 square feet) connected to the theater in the main academic building on campus is augmented by displays of the university collection throughout offices and public hallways. There is also an outdoor art walk, made up of commissioned pieces and others on loan. A brochure with a map and information on the art walk is available outside the gallery door.

The gallery closes for summer, but is currently showing a nicely calibrated exhibition of works by four artists, Eva Lee, Dorothy Powers, Suzan Shutan and Eve Stockton. Each lives and works within 25 miles of Sacred Heart University, and each uses lines in interesting and unusual ways. Titled "The Local Line," the exhibition is on view through June 1.