

## the world of art

## Eric Anfinson: Art as Purgation and Self-Realization



'Athena.'



'Broken Heart.'



'Aphrodite.'

By Joel Blair

Eric Anfinson has created a new body of art dramatically different from his previous work, the frequent subject of which was beautiful women.

In the exhibit at Art 612 on Fleming Street, Anfinson presents art as drama, art as purgation of unhealthy emotions — what Aristotle said was a function of tragedy — and art as self-renewal and triumph.

At the age of 16, Anfinson suffered an accident in football that left him without the use of his limbs. Not until he was 30 did he begin painting. He explains his ability to paint after suffering such an extreme injury by quoting Chuck Close: drawing requires finger dexterity; painting, the arm and shoulder. And Anfinson's right shoulder and arm have enough flexibility for him to paint. His art began to flourish when he joined the two other artists in

the Lemonade Stand Gallery and Studio only a few years ago.

Before this show, Anfinson's work eschewed direct personal reference. Now he has an explicit "Self-Portrait," a series of paintings on "The Judgment of Paris" and a portrait of the suffering Jesus. Each work stands alone; one need not know the biography of the artist. Yet in each, he reveals personal facts about his difficult life. As someone noted, this is a gutsy show.

Throughout the middle ages, the Suffering Christ was a frequent image in art; the Dutch, the Germans and the Spanish found that vision of Jesus especially congenial. During the Renaissance, a less disturbing image of the Savior gained favor. Yet Anfinson's Christ suffers as convincingly as Cranach's.

Note the cross in the

painting; it is the goalpost from a football field; the two thieves in the background are also on similarly shaped crosses. The forehead wound in Anfinson's Christ is not from thorns but from one of the modern screws attaching a "halo" to the skull of a traumatized, injured person, thus holding the head in place during the healing process. The rounded belly results from a body that is unable to move; the muscles have atrophied. The effects of the artist's past suffering are transferred to the body of Christ, thus making the artist whole and happy. His suffering has been taken over by a sur-

observer.

The extended narrative in the exhibit are the five paintings of "The Judgment of Paris," in which Paris, a prince of Troy, has to choose the most beautiful of the goddesses and give her a golden apple. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, wins and is seen holding the apple. Around her are doves, symbols of peace, love and beauty. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, has a wise owl beside her and holds a skull, a symbol of *memento mori*: Remember, we will die. Hera, wife of Zeus, represents the blessings of marriage and stability. To these three, Anfinson adds Hesta, the goddess

rogate, an image he has created. Anfinson is not a particularly religious person. He is an artist who understands the transforming effects of art, both on the artist and the careful

of the hearth, who is surrounded by a floral trellis and has a glowing candle before her.

Anfinson's beautiful women now are given the context of an ancient myth about man's choices in life. His picture of Paris, the Trojan, as St. Francis is also a self-portrait. The artist is the man making the choices about how he will overcome his suffering and lead a useful, fulfilled life.

A kind of coda to the exhibit is the statue of David entwined with a living vine, which has a single flower in bloom. Nature is making the broken statue of David whole. In the background is a man with a red balloon (which appears in several of these paintings), a reference to the movie "The Red Balloon" that dramatizes, among other things, the persistence of joy in life, in spite of the evils and dangers that are also part of it.

The exhibit remains at Art 612, 612 Fleming St., until April 6.