

ALEXANDRE

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By Brian O'Doherty

Art: A Playboy at Work
Neil Welliver's Paintings Spoof El Greco

Two painters, one an excellent playboy and the other a good grammarian, and one a visionary sculptor can be seen this week at the galleries. They are Neil Welliver at the Stable Gallery, 36 East Seventy-fourth Street; Thomas Downing at the Allan Stone Gallery, 18 East Eighty-second Street, an Elbert Weinberg, whose sculpture is at the Borgenicht Gallery, 1018 Madison Avenue.

Mr. Welliver is a playboy and, a good one. Keeping his tongue firmly in his cheek he invites himself to weddings, pastorals, deaths, and the spoofing of a great European predecessor, El Greco, by means of a visual shorthand that seems derived from a part of Georg Grosz put through the fruitful indiscipline of expressionist abstraction.

His predominant color is a flesh tone of shameless pink, covering the nude continents of female flesh that take up a great deal of Mr. Welliver's canvases. The ladies, rather goofily serious and sadly overweight, wear hair-dos like enlarged ear muffs, so that they look a bit like overgrown bunnies. They are attended by formally dressed men, vary knowing of eye, who have all the worst intentions unconcealed on bibulous faces. They look like cronies of Mack the Knife playing a happy version of "The Three-Penny Opera." For Mr. Welliver's amiable satires are nearer to parody.

He paints with a sketchy prefabricated style that makes for fairly easy reading of flat space, and while some of his works are hurried, he is a delightful new artist. He can go much farther with this genre if he understands just a little more that being funny is a serious business.