

Exhibits highlight trend toward humor; artists have fun with a variety of subjects

By DIANE HEILENMAN
Art Critic

It's all right to giggle in art galleries now. In fact, it's fine to go ahead and laugh out loud. The viewer or artist who has fun with art is no longer considered a cultural failure.

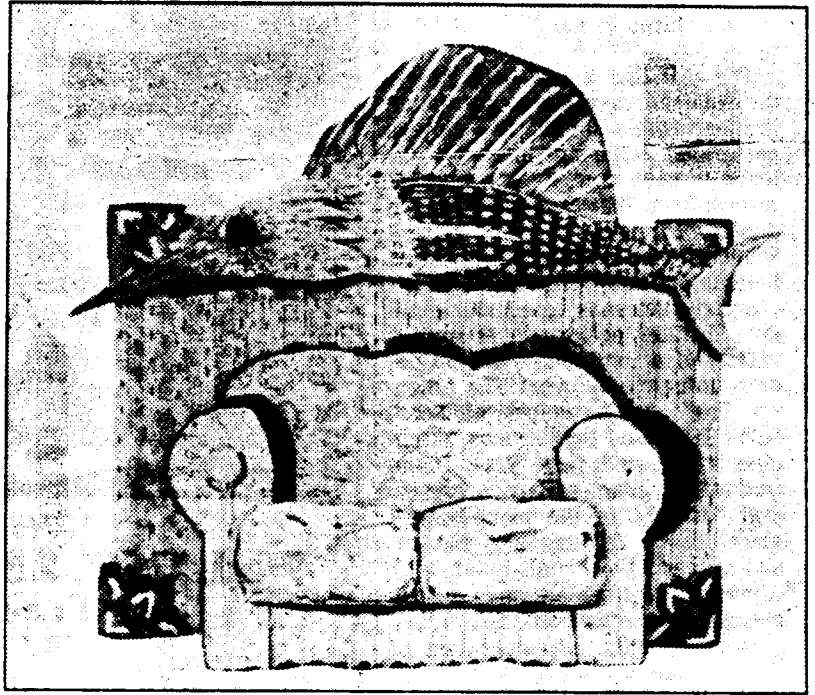
However, it's sometimes a case of many a jest being spoken in truth. A case in point is some of the work in "Just for Fun," at Louisville's Liberty National Bank. It's one of four exhibits currently in the region in which the statements made by art objects range from simple puns to complex satires.

In the Liberty show, a painted metal couch by Dana Tindall of Ludlow, Ky., called "Couch Painting" is pretty self-explanatory.

On the other hand, a type case hung on the wall, filled with small plastic toys and junk, covered with glitter in five different colors and ringed with Christmas-tree lights seems at first an impossible bit of "bad taste." However, with a little reflection, a viewer recognizes that this bit of gaudy nonsense, created by Meg Higgins of Louisville, is poking fun at both the mania to make anything into a collection and the myth of art as a beautiful object.

Almost anything is fair game for the Liberty Gallery artists. They tackle Carl Sagan and the Mona Lisa, space travel and fast food, Spuds McKenzie and the good-ol'-boy country cliché. It's just for fun, certainly, but the exhibit also highlights a recent trend toward humor and away from the intellectual games and metaphysical mysteries that characterized most American art after World War II.

Artists appear as less complex pranksters in "It's Reigning Cats and Dogs" at Louisville's Park Gallery. This show is a display of broadly humorous pet portraits and stereotypes. The sculpted, painted and drawn animals by nine regional and national artists are often so fatuously, pantingly eager to please that even the most rabid animal lover



This painted metal couch by Dana Tindall is in a Liberty Bank show.

will get the joke.

A "Masks" exhibit at the Louisville-based Kentucky Art and Craft Foundation Gallery is fun, despite some "distracting" tendencies among the 28 artists to make art more mysterious than humorous.

Probably the best funny art show is in Cincinnati. An exhibit of 10 years' worth of recent work by California painter Robert Colescott at Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center tackles U.S. history, art history and cultural sacred cows with a disarming but disturbing buffoonery.

Colescott, who has said he wants to put black people into art history, makes his point by remaking famous art and film scenes. For example, George Washington Carver crosses the Delaware in one work, and in another Shirley Temple becomes a cute, little, chubby-legged black girl rolling her eyes at Bill Robinson, a white man cavorting like an "Uncle Tom." Colescott takes on DeKooning by placing the

face of Aunt Jemima atop a big-breasted abstract DeKooning "woman."

Colescott's satires may not amuse all equally. As Will Rogers once said, "Everything is funny as long as it is happening to somebody else."

The Liberty exhibit, at 416 W. Jefferson St., continues through Dec. 3. Hours are 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday.

The Park Gallery exhibit, at 3936 Chenoweth Square, continues through Oct. 31. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and until 8 p.m. Thursday.

The Kentucky Art and Craft Gallery exhibit, at 609 W. Main St., continues through Oct. 31. Hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

The Contemporary Arts Center exhibit, at 115 E. Fifth St., continues through Nov. 7. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Saturday.