

An artist of the artists gets his due

ART NOTES



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Carl Köhler's portraits of writers to be featured at downtown Dallas library



Photos by Henry Köhler

Marina Tsvetaeva is one of the works of Carl Köhler, who specialized in portraits of artists. His paintings will be on display at the J. Erik Jonsson Library.

It's an all-too-familiar story in the worlds of art, literature and music: Artists toil in obscurity for years, never being recognized for the work they create. Until, of course, they're gone, when everyone suddenly takes notice.

To a large extent, that's the story of Carl Köhler, a Swedish neo-Modernist painter who lived from 1919 to 2006. I have learned about Carl from his son, Henry Köhler, who lives in Sweden and who, through the miracle of email, has kept me apprised of his father's work, of which he is a tireless champion.

Henry has succeeded in landing exhibitions that extol his father's greatness in libraries in Brooklyn, N.Y., Washington, D.C., and now, Dallas. The Carl Köhler retrospective runs through August at the J. Erik Jonsson Central Library.

Carl Köhler specialized in portraits, primarily of fellow artists, be they writers, musicians or painters, who

influenced his own rare style. His subjects included novelist and poet Charles Bukowski (not a subject that most painters dared to tackle). Köhler painted riveting portraits of James Joyce, Günter Grass, Joyce Carol Oates, Michael Jackson, Simone de Beauvoir and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Art critic Emily Colette Wilkinson writes that Köhler's "often exquisite pairings of style and subject give his work an arresting and distinctive expressiveness." Drawn frequently to writers as artistic subjects, Köhler manages, Wilkinson writes, to "distill the essence of each artist — the mood and aesthetics of each artist's work — with an uncanny, luminous intensity."

His portrait of Bukowski is, in its own way, dark and brooding, like the writer himself, but with a softness that also suggests a quiet vulnerability.

Henry Köhler contends that his father captured with his pencil and pen the inner

selves of the subjects he painted and that his art is simply "way too interesting to put in the closet." Thus, Henry's one-man crusade to bring the art of Carl Köhler to places such as Dallas, where, as in other cities, libraries have been far more receptive than galleries or museums.

Cohn Drennan Contemporary opens its new show, "Summer at Camp Ashton," with a reception from 6 to 8 Friday night. The exhibition at the Ashton Gallery, 2215 Cedar Springs Road in Dallas, features six artists.

The Dallas gallery Gray Matters offers a nod to history with its new show, "Made in Oak Cliff," which carries this description: "North Texas art history in the making: Working in cheap studios in Oak Cliff, free-wheeling artists George Green, Jack Mims, Jim Roche, Bob Wade and Mac Whitney brought national attention to Dallas art in the 1970s."

At Photographs Do Not Bend, that staple of the Dallas Design District, Thomas Kennaugh's work can be seen through Aug. 3.

"Group f.8: Deserts, Seas and Journeys," an exhibition of new and recent photographic works by Fort Worth's Group f.8 collective, is on display through Aug. 3 at William Campbell Contemporary Art, 4935 Byers Ave. in Fort Worth. The reception is from 6 to 8 p.m. June 22.

Craighead Green presents the fourth installment of "First Launch," featuring the works of Fort Worth artist Devon Nowlin. The opening reception for Nowlin's "Relationship Status" is from 6 to 9 Thursday night, 1011 Dragon St.

Denise M. Fulton's "Painted Forest" runs through June 29 at Norwood Flynn Gallery, 3318 Shorecrest Drive in Dallas.



American writer Joyce Carol Oates was another subject for Köhler. The Swedish artist's son has been a tireless champion of his father's work.