

Sunday
Blend

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KINDRED SPIRITS

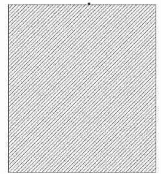
DINNERSTEIN, SIROTA CARRY CREATIVE CONVERSATION INTO COLUMBIA

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OVATION



**Heart
to heart**

"Night Scene I" by Simon Dinnerstein, 1982, conté crayon, colored pencil

Kindred artistic spirits bring creative conversation to Columbia

By Aarik Danielsen
Columbia Daily Tribune

Simon Dinnerstein and Robert Sirota met the way many adults do — through their children.

Both men are fathers to musical wunderkinds who grew up to become musical tastemakers. Simone Dinnerstein is a pianist whose talents stretch across genre; Jonah and Nadia Sirota are violists with world-class reputations.

As their children came of age in the New York City music scene, the Dinnersteins and Sirotas encountered each other at concerts and in ever-concentric social circles.

Both men, of course, are known for much more than their bloodlines. August artists in their respective fields, Simon Dinnerstein is a heralded visual artist; Robert Sirota, a widely-performed composer.

Much as their flesh-and-blood became acquainted years ago, Dinnerstein and Sirota have introduced their creative children, their work engaging in a sort of dance that Columbia audiences recently had the chance to enjoy.

Last week, *Alarm Will Sound* — which counts Nadia Sirota as a member — premiered Robert Sirota's "Three Nocturnes," based on a trio of Dinnerstein's drawings, at the Mizzou International Composers Festival. Pieces of Dinnerstein will remain behind in Columbia; an evocative, wide-ranging exhibit of his

work remains on display at the University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archaeology through year's end.

Mutual admiration society

Dinnerstein and Sirota share great mutual respect, owed in part to their creative results and reputations. Their rapport also is nourished by the flexibility and humility each man brings to his craft.

Dinnerstein's body of work has been paid attention all over the globe. Most notable is a piece that has launched a thousand essays, reflections and conversations.

"The Fulbright Triptych," an exquisite, earthy family portrait of sorts, was composed in the early 1970s and anchors the exhibit at MU.

Sirota has taught at some of the East Coast's great music schools and had works performed by orchestras, ensembles such as yMusic and Yale Camerata, and in venues like the Washington Square Contemporary Music Society.

Sirota first approached Dinnerstein about writing in response to his images. The pair traded suggestions and Sirota settled on three muses: "Night," "Purple Haze" and "Night Scene I." Dinnerstein was impressed with the choices Sirota made, and the way his seeing established and emphasized unity between the pieces.

"It makes it a very cohesive idea," he said. "All nocturnal, all mysterious, all mystical. Someone could have chosen three disparate images, and I thought the choices set forth the whole thing."

Similarly, Sirota sees Dinnerstein, again and again, finding a sweet spot between the universal and specific in his work. The amount of detail with which to play is staggering, he said.

"It makes itself very, in the best sense, adaptable for a touchstone for another work of art," Sirota said. "I imagine I could, actually, write two other works of art on these same images and they would be completely different."

Into the night

Striking out into the night of Dinnerstein's work, Sirota primarily concerned himself with the texture of each piece.

Dinnerstein created "Night" in response to a play performed by children

See ART, E6

in a class his wife taught. Trying to remove any class barriers, and cause for hurt feelings, she had the children make their own costumes in class, rather than buy them or get their parents' help.

There was a "nuclear explosion of energy" in their work, Dinnerstein said, and he silently kicked himself for not bringing a sketchbook or camera to record the scene.

He asked his wife to repeat the work the following year. "I didn't try to do it" from memory, he said. "I waited."

The work marries the soul of childhood with more existential realizations. Dinnerstein, who joked that he never once has participated in Halloween, placed the children in their homemade costumes and himself inside the work.

His own childhood

fears are represented, and a boy in the left-hand corner of the frame responds to where Dinnerstein has posed himself in other works. The boy is both participant and onlooker, Dinnerstein said.

Sirota drew out elements — as well as essential ideas — in his own work. The ensemble approximates the sound of a New York City subway, for example, and uses children's instruments.

"Purple Haze" portrays a nude woman stretched across a city skyline. Like "Night," it contains two signatures of Dinnerstein's work, as articulated by Sirota. The first is the presence of an urban landscape — and the special sense of possibility that rises up from a city, Sirota said.

The second, a clear distinction between background, middle ground and foreground that brings physical and emotional layers to the work.

Sirota called the image "joyful and erotic"; Dinnerstein described it as "ecstatic."

With those two "active" images as bookends, Sirota searched for an image to inspire a middle adagio. "Night Scene I," with a haze as purple-gray as Dinnerstein's so-called piece, was "crystalline" and "pointillistic" to the composer's eyes. He wrote for "high-pitched," "struck" instruments "against this sheen of muted string chords."

Sirota finds satisfaction in creating musical conversations with other artists' work. In each opportunity, as with Dinnerstein, he deeply considers each emotion and element.

Then he goes with his gut.

"Ultimately I think about these things a lot. But then I just write the piece," he said. "The piece comes out as a kind of manifestation of my emotional response to these images."

A self-proclaimed "avocational" painter in his personal time, Sirota drew on a first-hand appreciation of the medium to the degree that it helped him find language and motion.

"In order to make music out of a painting, you have to translate the painting into some kind of temporal motion," he said.

Both artists expressed a lack of possession or preciousness over their work. To voluntarily cede control of how another person interprets it or, in this case, creates a formal companion, is inherent to the artistic process.

"I think that's the way it is," Dinnerstein said. "You have children, and you do the best you can. And they go out and you've put in your time. That's as good as you could do."

"You have to accept the fact that these are received works of art," Sirota added. "Whatever your conviction about a higher power, certainly these come from a part of your consciousness which you can't always access. Once they exist, they take on a life of their own."

See ART, E7

The composer has long tried to bring a sense of affinity and intimacy into his work. Early in his career, he felt himself struggle to write for unfamiliar ensembles. That tension was best resolved through personal knowledge.

"Once I know who's playing it and how they play and what they like and who they are, then I can write a piece that expresses something that I think they're capable of expressing and would want to express," he said.

Dinnerstein gave numerous reasons to trust Sirota. For one, he sees something of himself in his musical counterpart.

"His axis, his musical axis, was close to mine. I thought he would do quite a good job with this," Dinnerstein said. "It's wild to have this done, because I can't say anything — and it's not my place to say something. And it's his baby."

He spoke of Sirota in the same breath as Bartok, Hindemith and Crumb, artists whose work sounds like the turning of a corner between tradition and modernity.

"You feel that it's of our time, but you feel it leans, or sits, on another area," Dinnerstein said.

Great minds think alike

Dinnerstein expressed a sort of slightly stunned gratitude at seeing many of his major works in the same gallery. "I haven't seen some of these in 40 years," he said.

Connecting the dots between each piece, he sees commitment and continuity.

"It feels like a kind of vision that I've stayed with," he said. "I see the origins of this vision in that" Fulbright "triptych, and how it emanates out."

That relatively seamless sensibility is just one more thing Dinnerstein and Sirota seem to have in common. Reflecting on the space between them, Dinnerstein invoked the words of a for-

mer teacher who said that all great art is both old and new.

“All very good painting, and I would say very good music, very good film, very good writing, is old art and new art together,” he said.

“Because if it’s only old art, you’ve lost something of

the daring, the new. And if it’s only new, it’s not going to be new all the time. It has to have old in it. That’s what I like about Bob’s work.”

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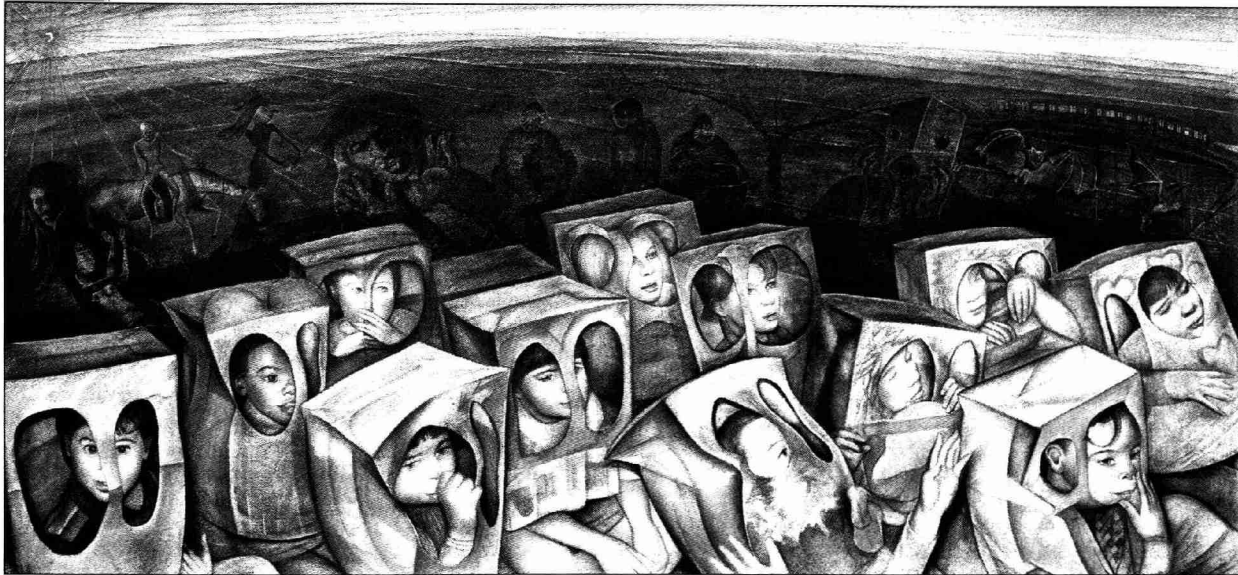
Want to go?

The Lasting World: Simon Dinnerstein and the Fulbright Triptych

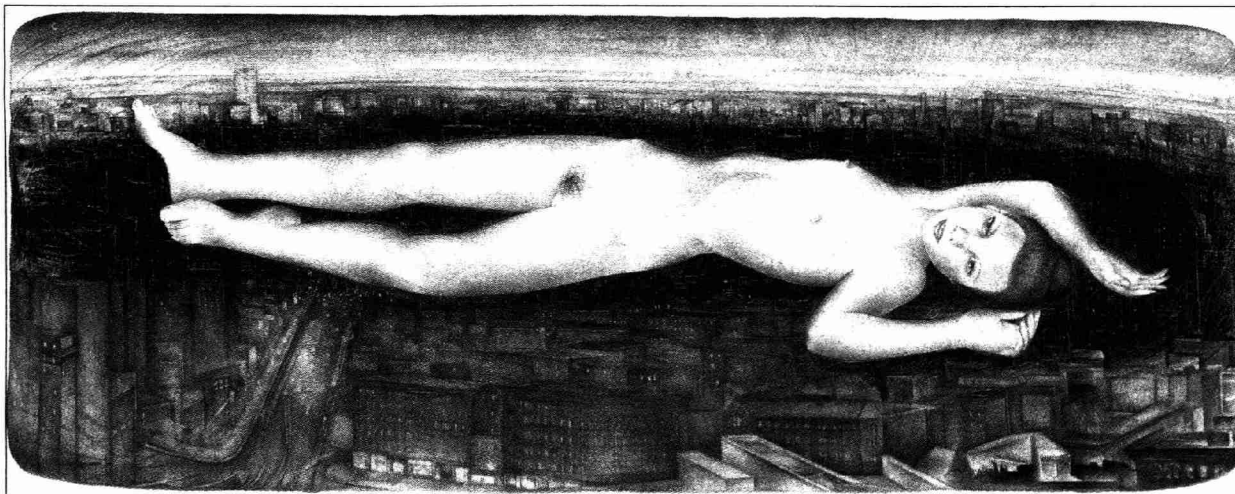
Where: University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archaeology, 115 Business Loop 70W

When: Through Dec. 22

Website: maa.missouri.edu



“Night” by Simon Dinnerstein, 1985, conté crayon, colored pencil, pastel, wax crayon and oil pastel



“Purple Haze” by Simon Dinnerstein, 1991, conté crayon, colored pencil, pastel, wax crayon, oil pastel