

Art

Keane visions focus on war, urban poor

By Alan G. Artner
Art critic

All the old arguments about British art being fundamentally illustrative flood back in the exhibition of paintings and works on paper by John Keane, at the Lannon-Cole Gallery, 365 W. Chicago Ave.

Keane, 38, is the painter who last year was commissioned to cover the gulf war by the Imperial War Museum in London. His pictures aspired to the sharpness of the poems Wilfred Owen wrote on the pity of the Great War and strongly conveyed a viewpoint that was anything but heroic.

On show at Lannon-Cole are studies for some of those pictures, pointedly collaged and energetically painted. Yet Keane's Neo-Expressionist manner does not easily lend itself to recording, and his collaged sections fail to administer the emotional jolt he most assuredly is after.

This leaves a quality not unlike a sermon or a lecture, which is to say, the work is more admirable for its moral point of view than for an ability to transmit it in pictorial terms both movingly



"Fairy Tales of London," 1992, by John Keane.

and freshly.

The other works on view are more successful in the means used to inveigh against the lot of the urban poor in the age of Thatcher. And though the artist again raises his voice from a pulpit, his imagery better matches his painting and his painting, as painting, is often electric.

Yes, Keane tells stories that he means his viewers to take as lessons, but that is no different from Sue Coe or Leon Golub, both of whom have found an au-

dience in Chicago. If anything, he has a better sense of form than Coe and a less self-regarding piety than Golub. So, illustrative or not, here is a painter who knows his medium and happily has put it at the service of a social vision that looks more hardheaded than softhearted. (Through May 8.)

DAVID CABRERA (Lockett, 703 N. Wells St.): Cabrera is an artist whose gay rights and AIDS activism find only minimal expression in his work, though much of the work would be ephemeral without it.

Like many younger artists, he does not confine himself to a single medium, instead alternating between rather broadly defined categories of painting and sculpture. As at his last exhibition here two years ago, he shows the two together as if they were conceived as a single installation.

Lockett's front gallery holds a series of watercolors that has one rapid stroke per sheet, in pink. These surround a length of pink ribbon stretching from ceiling to floor and a hardened puddle of concrete.

The works in three dimensions

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