

The Miami Herald

THE FOREMOST DAILY NEWSPAPER OF FLORIDA

SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 1996

The Herald



ART REVIEW

Kate Kretz's *3:15* is among the works on display in a faculty exhibition at the Art Museum at FIU that also includes works by Christine Tamblyn. Review, 3G.

LIVING & arts

Intriguing show by women and about women

By ELISA TURNER
Special to The Herald

Lush and luminous, paintings by Kate Kretz speak of dreamy, nighttime worlds alive with possibilities and portents. *Beauty Wrest* is her show of painstaking, immaculately crafted oil paintings, mostly of women sleeping or resting. They create a fascinating counterpoint to Christine Tamblyn's interactive CD-ROM installation, based on the biographies of 10 women. Work by both artists is on display in the faculty exhibition, which opened June 14, at the Art Museum at Florida International University.

Here, traditions and the high-tech world of cyber-space com-

ART REVIEW

fortably exist side by side, linked by intriguing variations on depictions of women and their lives.

Kretz's paintings, glowing with color, are the most immediately accessible. Most show young women asleep or drowsing off among ruffled bedclothes, or curled up in the passenger seats of cars. These women, blooming with youth but shadowed with stress, slump in passive poses, their "beauty wrest."

Kretz's rather heavy-handed titles add a Harlequin Romance spin: *I Let Him, But I Didn't*

Really Like It . . . is the title of the most sumptuously painted piece in the show. Here, a woman fitfully dozes among fat, floral pillows, while a nearly spent candle casts a still-powerful light. Despite the clichéd confession of unwanted seduction, the imagery is far more complex.

In many of her works, Kretz applies a seductive trick of her own. She lures us into the gorgeously textured, nighttime environments that evoke the gleaming, ripely symbolic realism of American painter Alfred Leslie, who, after making his mark as an abstract expressionist in the 1950s, turned in the 1960s to painting contemporary figures.

There's also a strong hint of the romantic style of the Pre-Raphaelites, 19th Century English artists absorbed with nostalgia for Medieval lore.

Kretz's heroines, for example, wear casual clothes that shimmer like rich silks. Their long hair is luxuriantly curled, a glimmering riot of ringlets. Yet, surrounding such radiant, sensual beauty is an atmosphere of darkness, restless melancholy, occasionally even anger. There's a claustrophobic feeling that threatens all this visual allure.

Darkness drives these luminous paintings, holding forth both fears and promises of something perhaps bigger and brighter — a world beyond the corny tales of sexual conquest evoked by Kretz's titles.