

From the article, *Providence emerging as printmaking powerhouse*

01:00 AM EST on Thursday, March 10, 2011

By Bill Van Sicien

Journal Arts Writer

In the Alfred Hitchcock movie “Vertigo,” a man (played by the great Jimmy Stewart) becomes obsessed with the portrait of a beautiful but slightly spooky-looking woman. Visitors to the current exhibit at the Bert Gallery may have a similar reaction to the work of Louise E. Marianetti, a Providence artist who was active in the 1930s and ’40s and who developed a highly personal blend of traditional realism and the kind of visual mind-games and psycho-dramas associated with Surrealism.

Though nearly forgotten today, Marianetti was a serious artist who spent several years studying with Thomas Hart Benton at New York’s fabled Art Students League. That training, which emphasized classical drawing and painting techniques, is apparent in works such as “The Mandolin,” a still life that includes a pitch-perfect copy of an Old Master portrait. (For the record, it’s the face of the angel in “The Virgin of the Rocks.”)

But it’s in her mesmerizing self-portraits that Marianetti’s mix of formal skill and emotional intensity really shines. In one particularly striking work, Marianetti shows herself drawing a portrait of her husband — her sharpened pencil held to his neck like a knife. At such moments Marianetti’s work resembles that of another artist who fearlessly explored her own psychic depths: Frida Kahlo.

Through March 19 at the Bert Gallery, 540 Water St. in Providence. Hours: Wednesday-Friday 11-5 and Saturday noon-4. Contact: (401) 751-2628 or www.bertgallery.com.

bvansicl@projo.com