

ART

A Painter Whose Works Are Steeped in Italy's Renaissance

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

ARTISANS in the Middle Ages referred to their techniques as recipes. Edward Giobbi, a 69-year-old Katonah-based painter, is keeping alive the connection between painting and food, for he is the author of two Italian cookbooks published by Alfred A. Knopf. But the flavor of his paintings is also dependent on a recipe that refers to the Italian Renaissance.

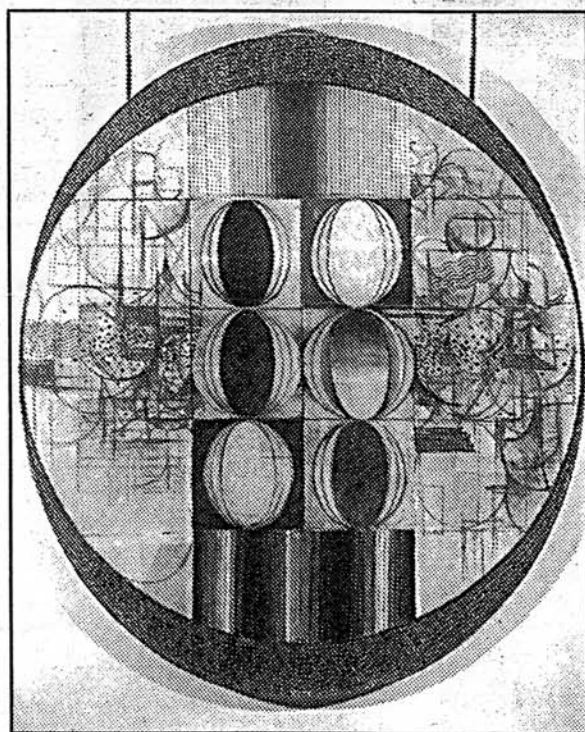
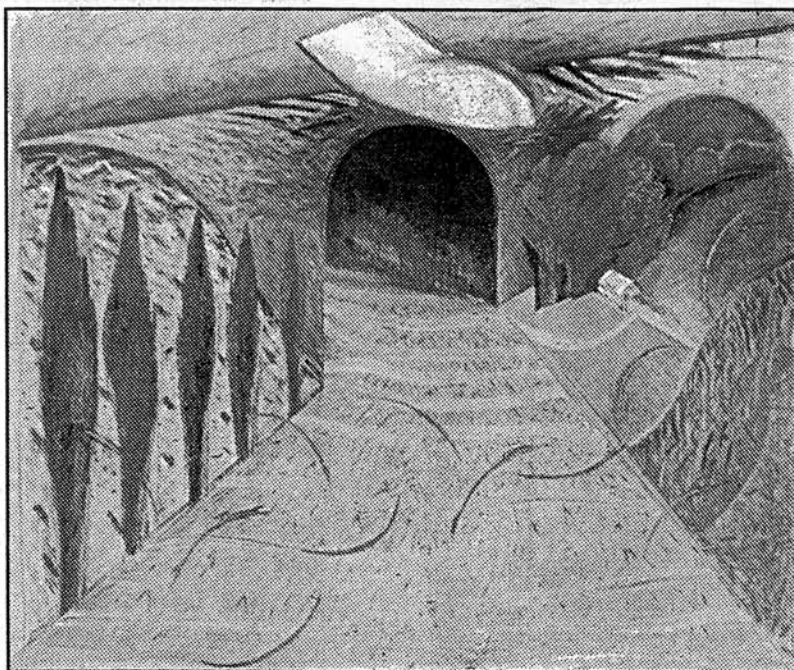
He tries to achieve the effect of fresco painting by using rabbit-skin glue to fix several layers of rice paper to canvas. The resulting surface is "velvety and porous" not unlike that of a wall prepared for fresco. Mr. Giobbi's debt to Renaissance painters goes beyond the technical. The themes of his paintings are the same as theirs.

At the Hudson River Museum, Mr. Giobbi is showing 11 works from a recent series titled "La Bocca Della Verita" ("The Mouth of Truth"). The series might be seen as mythological landscapes updated and made relevant to Mr. Giobbi's life in Westchester, where he has lived for the last 30 years. He was born in Waterbury and studied art in Florence in the 1950's.

The paintings in the series show a chef's resourcefulness. He uses one major set of ingredients and varies the garnishes to produce radically different flavors. The left side of each composition contains rolling hills, often with manicured cypress trees. This is the Italian reference. On the right is a precise drawing of Mr. Giobbi's Katonah farmhouse. In between is the real drama: a river sweeps into a dark tunnel.

As a viewer progresses through the series, begun in 1992 and continuing, the atmosphere grows darker, and more potential meanings enter the atmosphere. Another consistent element is a stylized female torso, a dorsal view hovering above the tunnel mouth, reminiscent of an angel in Italian painting. It is a definite eroticizing ingredient.

In addition to being steeped in the art of past centuries, Mr. Giobbi is interested in the roots of the current century's artistic preoccupations, notably Cubism and Futurism. Acknowledging the former, he often distorts or warps space. For example, the tunnel might be merely the flattened arch of a viaduct; several



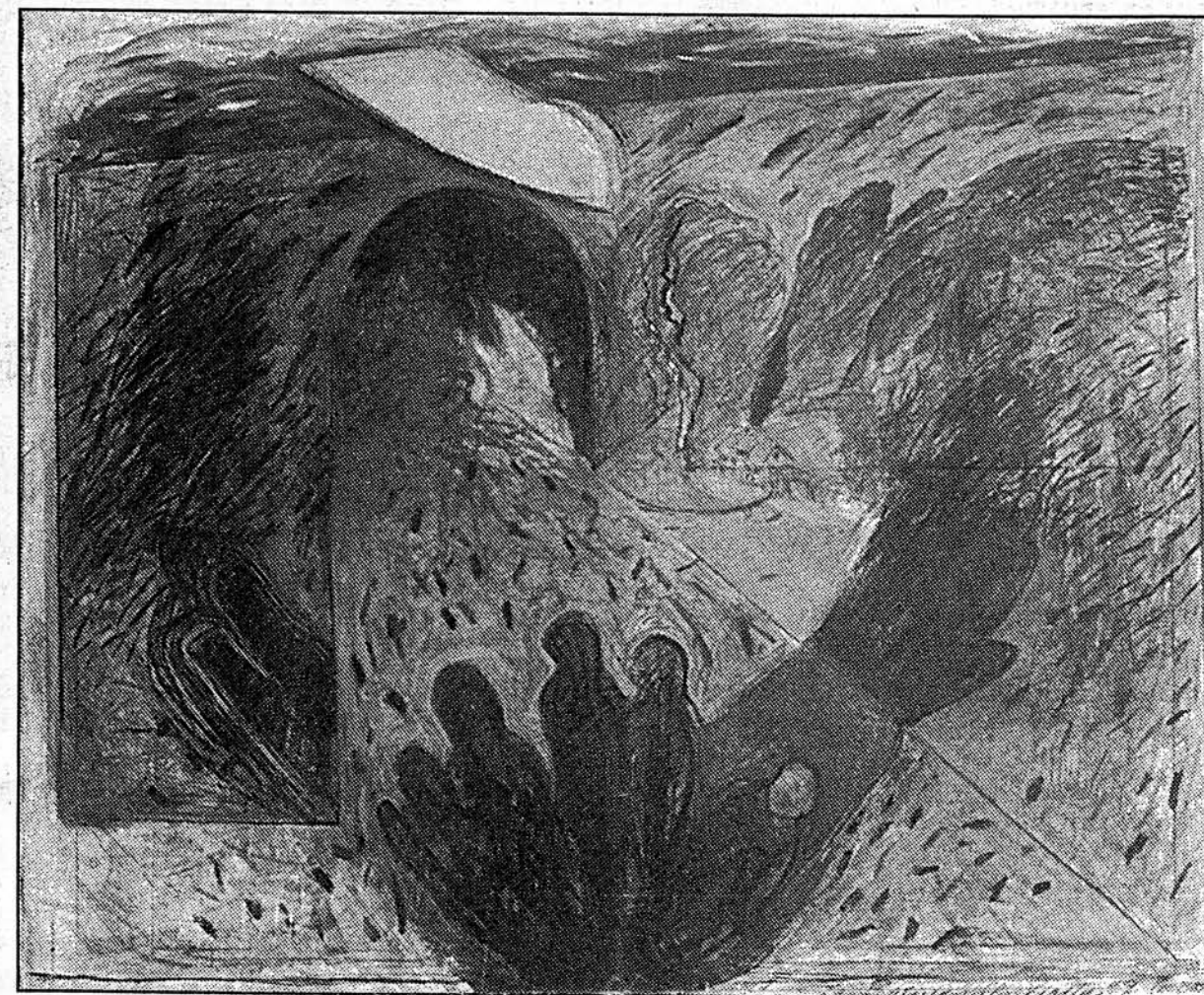
John D. Schiff

works have more than one arched element, hinting at a chain of them. Scale is idiosyncratic; the farmhouse, though meticulously rendered, is like a doll house and has a doll house's fragility.

The first painting in the series exhibited, "No. 2," pulls out all the stops. It has the most defined trees, and the sky is the romantic orange of

sunset. Soon, however, in "No. 5," the whole composition is saturated red and a sense of disquiet enters. A viewer might recall Antonioni's film, "The Red Desert" with its pervasive ambience of anxiety. Next to it, "No. 6," is a verdant painting, but chilling also. A figure on the left, which could be read as a tree, is also animated like the shadow of a human figure.

ABOVE "La Bocca Della Verita No. 4" by Edward Giobbi.
LEFT The 1968 mixed media on canvas collage "Rape of Europa No. 2."
TOP RIGHT "La Bocca Della Verita No. 9."



Rice paper gives a fresco effect.

As the series continues, the torso shifts its angle slightly, as does the farmhouse.

Farther on more figures materialize. In "No. 9," a splayed group of dark figures might also be a tree. In "No. 10," two distinct figures huddle in the foreground and bring to mind refugees. Meanwhile, the tunnel grows more menacing with fire and smoke like the mouth of hell. Mr. Giobbi is becoming more obvious in his sense of the world, represented by the natural environment, becoming an increasingly dangerous place. His frustrations are kept in check

by his adherence to his compositional schemes, but in a couple of watercolor studies he lets his feelings go. In those, the precise elements are almost totally obscured by a furious and random splattering of paint.

Earlier works by Mr. Giobbi are on display at Nardin Galleries in Somers. One thing this dual showing of Mr. Giobbi accomplishes is to bring together the upper and lower parts of Westchester County, twain that don't always meet. At Nardin the work is all abstract, though with allusions to the figure. The two pieces from 1968, each with the title "The Rape of Europa," are large ovals, again of layered elements. Inside each large oval is a grid of smaller ovals, built up in slightly overlapping layers, so that the interiors of the small ovals are genuine hollows, with steps going to their perimeters.

Flanking the grid in "Rape of Europa No. 2" is serendipitous drawing, derived from Analytical Cubism, but

differing from it in that it is not harsh angularity but is instead composed of semicircles and wave patterns, which seem to allude to the femaleness of the work's title.

Around the room at Nardin are 11 black, gray and white pastels from a 1979 series titled "Good Friday." The allusion is, of course, to the Passion of Jesus. The main element in each of the pastels is again an oval, but inside each black oval are triangular white shards, which make the ovals into rude pinwheels. There is an element of gaiety as the ovals career through dark space, but the sharp elements also pierce. Mr. Giobbi's careerlong enterprise would seem to be a delicate but charged balance of forces.

"La Bocca Della Verita" is at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers through Oct. 8. For information, call 963-4550. "The Rape of Europa" and "Good Friday" are at Nardin Galleries in Somers through Aug. 15. For information, call 276-8485.