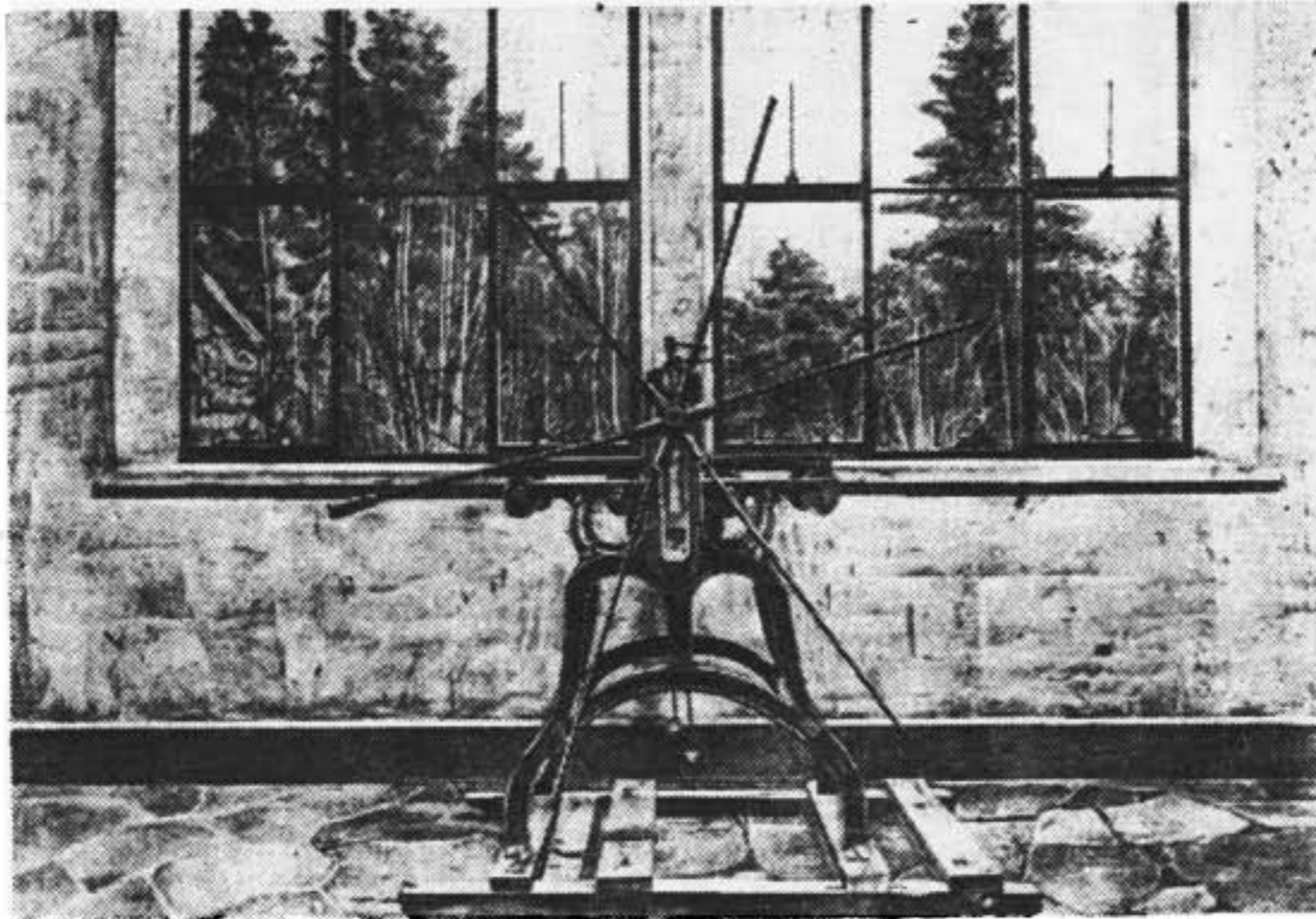


In Dinnerstein's Painting, an Echo Chamber



"The Kelton Press," in charcoal, by Simon Dinnerstein, is at the Staempfli Gallery

By JOHN RUSSELL

Simon Dinnerstein was born in Brooklyn in 1943, at a time when Germany was a foe to be overthrown at all costs. In 1970 that same Simon Dinnerstein went to Germany on a Fulbright scholarship. Fulbrights for Germany were easier to get than Fulbrights for France, Britain or Italy, and Mr. Dinnerstein responded in any case to the ancient German tradition of exact plain statement in art.

He went to Kassel, a city not much visited by foreigners except in every fourth summer, when the "Documenta" exhibitions have attracted the international art world to Kassel for months on end. He lodged in the outskirts of the city, where the steeply pitched roofs of the postwar housing estate peter out one by one, and the seraphic landscape beyond is much as it was in Dürer's day.

It looked a dullish sort of place, by the standards of Manhattan. But dullness can concentrate the mind, and Mr. Dinnerstein began to paint and draw not only what was immediately in front of him but also himself, and his wife, and all the things that he had most loved in the way of past art.

It took him forever. Whether it would be ready for his show at the Staempfli Gallery, 47 East 77th Street, was long in doubt. The view from the paired windows would alone have been a year's work for many artists. Then there was the interior, with its floor-to-ceiling pinboard, its tableful of instruments shown in deep perspective, its seated portraits of the artist and of his wife with their small baby, and its encyclopedia of visual enthusiasms. Those enthusiasms included masterpieces of French and Italian painting in small-scale reproduction, air letters, children's drawings, newspaper clippings and a big black letter "y," islanded on white paper. The completed picture measures 6 feet 7 inches by 13 feet.

Neither scale nor perseverance has anything to do with success in art, and Mr. Dinnerstein's triptych could be just one more painstaking failure. But it succeeds as an echo chamber, as a scrupulous representation of a suburb in the sticks, as a portrait of young people who are trying to make an honorable go of life and as an inventory of the kinds of thing that in 1975 give such people a sense of

their own identity. Today is the last day of the show, but the triptych will be available to interested persons until further notice. It deserves to go to a museum.