

Aldrich show is embarrassment of

By Kathie Beals

riches

With three important exhibitions going on at the same time, it's an embarrassment of riches at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art.

One is "Intermedia," a survey of big, bold works that partake of both painting and sculpture without looking very much like either. A second is a small (eight paintings) show of new acquisitions. And the third is the work of one of the most original artists on the contemporary scene — a man who is easily the equal of Saul Steinberg — and that is James Grashow.

If Grashow's name rings a bell locally, it could come from a version of his sculptural grouping, the robot-like buildings of "A City," that astonished and delighted people going into the theaters at SUNY College Purchase during Summer-fare '83. The name is also seen on illustrations (drawings and woodcuts) appearing in Time and other magazines, the New York Times and book and record jackets.

A selection of Grashow's enchanting works on paper, some serious, most light-hearted, is hung in the Aldrich's Showcase Gallery on the ground floor. Among the serious subjects is a leafy houseplant tied to a stick; the title is "Martyred Plant" — another anthropomorphic triumph. Among the witty are his poster for the New York Marathon, his "Spaghetti Disaster" and his "Fly" series. The flies are the horse fly, the house fly, the dragon fly, the pants fly, the fruit fly, the fire fly and the Spanish fly and if they don't make you laugh at the same moment you are admiring the elegant drawing, it will be a bad day for us all.

Grashow's "A City" is also at the Aldrich, but this time we can walk through it, and this time we approach by way of the suburbs. Three comfortably old fashioned houses, each on its own pedestal, mark the entrance to the architectural humanoids. The houses are done "straight," perhaps to sharpen the contrast, but I would like to think the real reason is that James Thurber's great cartoon of the threatening housewife (part of the house was her profile) said it once and for all.

The paintings that come out from the wall and the sculptures covered with paint in the Intermedia show include loans from New York galleries and private collectors (such as board member Martin Sosnoff, who basically put the show together with the help of founder Larry Aldrich) as well as art from the Aldrich's permanent collection.

Sosnoff writes in his catalog essay that the show represents 20 years of art history — some of it in the future, according to the catalog date of 1985 for Jack Youngerman's "Swirl." Looking at the so-called *piece de resistance* of the show, Frank Stella's very large (115x120x24 inches) tangle of painted aluminum strips, one wonders if the graffiti it so vividly resembles counts as real art history.

A stunning work is Robert Morris' modern version of a bas relief. All white and made of cement and plaster, it is a melange of disembodied human parts, rather like a da Vinci notebook of anatomy, but far more interesting and decorative. Other impressive pieces are Timothy Woodman's "Phaeton," in the spirit of a classical Greek frieze (including bright paint); Adele Seltzer's misty aluminum abstraction "Balance Reflections No. 4;" and Carolee Thea's painted wooden construction that looks faintly devotional, as if it were made of parts from an altar. Among the other 30 names on view are Christo, Red Grooms, Niki De Saint Phalle, Robert Rauschenberg and George Segal.

One comes last to the recent acquisitions because they have a room of their own on the third floor. Only one has a recognizable figure in it, in case we wondered how the return to representational was coming along. The others are pleasingly energetic abstractions with one thing in common: Each has some form of patterning, the latest trend in two-dimensional work.

The three exhibitions continue through May 6 at The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, 258 Main St. Ridgefield, Conn. Hours are Friday from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. There is an admission fee. On Sunday, Jan. 29 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. there will be a slide lecture on James Grashow's work; the artist will be present to discuss it with the museum's curator of education, Maartha B. Scott.