

The New York Times

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1984

By JOHN RUSSELL

Carmen Cicero (Graham Gallery Modern, 1014 Madison Avenue at 79th Street): With the opening of the van Gogh show at the Met now a bare two weeks away, it is easy to see him as the possibly somewhat disconcerted great-grandfather of much of today's highly energized and fiercely chromatic figuration. As we shall see from his two versions of the night cafe in Arles at the Met, van Gogh knew just how to turn up the heat.

People who try for that effect today most often end by charring their fingers, but Carmen Cicero is in quite a different league from most of his juniors. At 58, he is a seasoned painter who by 1971 had had five New York solo shows at the Peridot Gallery. Then his studio burned down, and it was as if his earlier career was obliterated overnight. The present show is his first in New York since 1971, and the wait — though doubtless it seemed long to him — is well rewarded.

Living on the Bowery, Cicero takes late-night subjects that are both rough and raw — death hailing a cab, a young man fleeing in terror from an invisible enemy on the waterfront, or his near-double running for dear life from a burning city in which even the flagstones are red hot. Others have had hideous fancies of the same kind, but Cicero's paintings have an educated presence. We see at once that he is a true painter, and one who has labored hard and long for his effects of spontaneity. From Currier and Ives to Milton Avery, and from the comic strip to German Expressionism, this former pupil of Robert Motherwell lives with learning lightly borne.

Summers in Provincetown have yielded quite another kind of picture — as when an outsize latter-day Venus rises from the sea in "Provincetown Princess." The princess herself is the product of wild fancy, but the painting of sea, sky and rock-

face is in the grand tradition.
(Through Oct. 20.)