

Art/Kay Larson

POWER'S UGLY FACE

NEW YORK

Kes Zapkus ESCAPED HIS NATIVE LITHUANIA during World War II, smuggled out by his mother after the death of his freedom-fighter father. "Children of War," the series of new paintings at John Weber Gallery, is his reconstruction of the shattered lives of youngsters born in a war zone. Each painting is a jagged hash of flying fragments, like shrapnel. Wedged deep into these scenes, in a kind of exclamation, are tanks on the move, parachutes in descent, bodies sprawled on the ground, and children's toys, which take on ominous overtones of interrupted play.

Zapkus is thinking hard about how to make a convincing picture of war. The paintings are like gasps, imploding and exploding and never allowing your experience of them to find an anchor. The problem is that they achieve what they intend—your sympathies are dismantled and destroyed rather than engaged. A long analysis can explain why such emotional dismemberment is an accurate picture of a war-torn childhood, but this feat, for all Zapkus's earnestness, remains arduously intellectual. (142 Greene Street: through November 24.)