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Starart: pop artists as painters

Skepticism is almost automatic when you hear of a project such as *Starart*, a hard-cover book heralded by the local art exhibition of six popular musicians. It seems a crass cash-in on their musical popularity —

i.e., "If you like Joni Mitchell's records, you'll just love her paintings..."

But the *Starart* project bears closer scrutiny for a few reasons. The most important one is that some of the works are impressive — not brilliant, but infinitely beyond proficient. Another is that these artists do not have to rely on their art for money and are thus perhaps more frank in appraising their works — ego apparently is not as crucial when one's livelihood is not involved.

The musicians involved in the project are Joni Mitchell, John Mayall, Cat Stevens, Klaus Voormann, Ron Wood and George Frayne, better known as *Commander Cody*. All but the latter two have exhibited their work on album covers. In fact, Voormann's cover for the *Starart* book is reminiscent of

his famous cover for the Beatles' *Revolver* album.

"People usually think that I paint to escape from the tension and pressure of being on the road," said Frayne at the casual, star-studded exhibit opening. "But, *au contraire* — that couldn't be farther from the truth. I'm as intense about painting as I am about my music."

Joni Mitchell sees synchronous influences on her art and music. "When I used to sing and play simple songs in coffeehouses," she said, peering intently through a fringe of blonde curls, "I made simple line drawings. But as I went into musical layering, my drawings went along. Any time there was an aesthetic shift in one, the partner would follow suit." ■