

NOWHERE EVERYWHERE

LOOKING FOR DIRECTION AT THOMPSON GALLERY

It's the first piece I see and, from a distance, it almost looks like a photograph: a man and his son stand on the sidewalk of a crowded, urban, black and white street, the man's attention held entirely by the phone in his palm. Clinging to his leg is his son, peering past the foreground with his back to the viewer as he stares down the road, almost looking to the people who are frozen in moments of candidness. Amid the hues of whites and grays that inundate their world, the two are the only things that stand in full color.

Examining the detail of the work even further, it's not a photograph, but an acrylic painting by Jennifer Amenta entitled "Searching...." Up close, the viewer is able to see that although the father and son stand in full color, they are not as detailed as the people behind them; to me, it seems to suggest that the more accessible information is, the less attuned we are to our own world. In her artist statement, Amenta writes that her work provides the viewer an opportunity to contemplate what they gain, and what they lose, by allowing technology to heavily influence their lives. However, with "Searching....," the lingering question is left unanswered: is technology a form of utopia – or does it lead to physical isolation?

This juxtaposed parallel of utopia and dystopia is the main theme of "Nowhere Everywhere," as it had been for the past two year-long exhibitions that shared the same name. The Cambridge School of Weston's English department suggested the theme, resulting in this third, collected assembly of work by 68 local and international artists.

Todd Bartel, a visual arts teacher for 14 years at the school who is also gallery director and curator of this exhibit, said that it wasn't a coincidence that Amenta's piece drew my eye first. He put it simply: it spoke to today and is "iconic of asking the hard questions of our culture: where are we headed?"

Kristin Powers Nowlin's pieces, "Good to the Last Drop: Coffee with Cream" and "The Land of Romance: Behind Closed Gates," forced me to consider the past before attempting to answer questions of the future. The woodblock works are printed onto paper and display an incredible sense of creativity; Nowlin plays with the grooves of the wood, and utilizes them as details in things such as curtains in the dining room, or the sky overlooking a gated community. Besides a strong attention to craftsmanship, what makes these works stand out is the subtle commentary on our country's history.

In the first print, four wealthy adults gather around a table, balancing fragile cups of coffee while a woman, enslaved, tends to them. It isn't until looking at the enslaved woman that the viewer's eye is drawn to a man sitting at the table with his hand covering her own, her expression hardened. In the second print, the same man pulls the woman by the hand directly, looking past his wife who stands opposite him. These subtle gestures lead me to pause, wondering about the permanent, dystopian past we have set in our history, and of the social/economic tensions in the fierce suppression of these women's voices.

"Nowhere Everywhere" fills the Thompson Gallery incredibly well and demonstrates Bartel's creative use of surrounding space. Yet, the exhibit continues past the walls of the Thompson Gallery and into the Red Wall Gallery, at the Mugar Center for Performing Arts. This building is less than a two-minute walk across campus, and leads to the second half of the exhibition, which will only be on view through May 13. Bartel explained that the Red Wall installation was curated because of the staggering amount of submissions that discussed utopian/dystopian ideals through the use of landscape, and as such, had merited its own focus.

THOMPSON GALLERY
THE CAMBRIDGE
SCHOOL OF WESTON
45 GEORGIAN ROAD
WESTON,
MASSACHUSETTS
THROUGH JUNE
18 (THOMPSON
GALLERY)
THROUGH MAY
13 (RED WALL
GALLERY)

Kirsten Stolle, Mrs. John
 Goldsmith, 1861/2014, collage
 7 1/2" x 5"





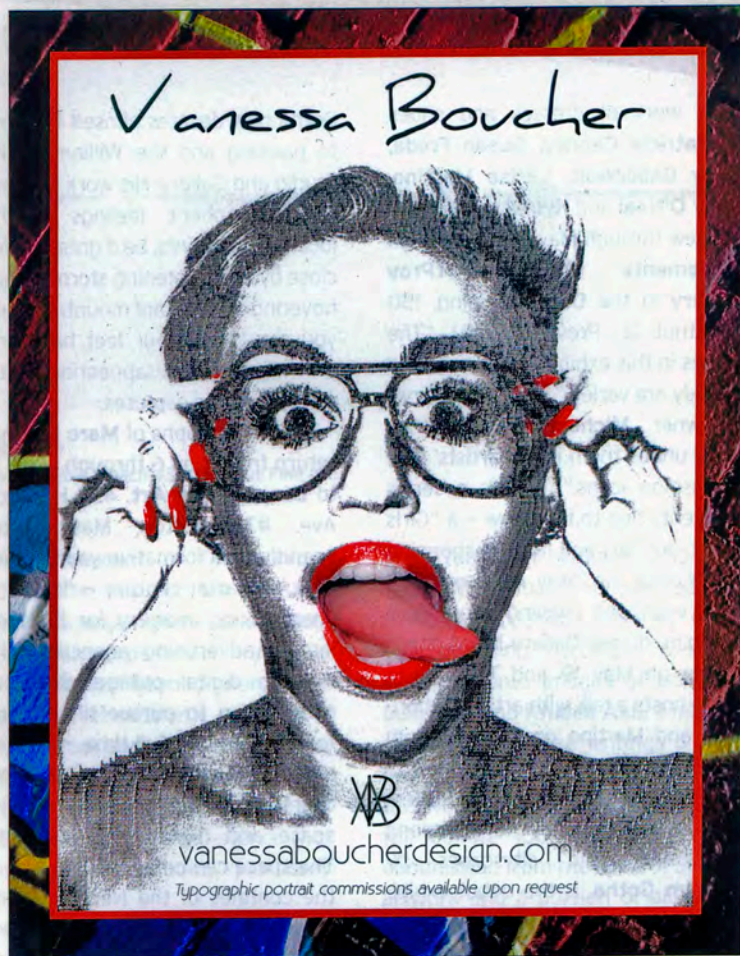
Jennifer Amenta, *Searching...*, oil on canvas, 40" x 40".

Bartel directed me to "Mt. Omuro (white haze)" by Martina Shenal. Her piece is largely composed of the gray, almost dirtied, negative space of the sky that looms above low, round hills toward the bottom of the photograph. The "dirtiness" of the sky solidifies very gently toward the center of the photograph, revealing a tight, muted, yellow tunnel of a fire. The tunnel's base falls upon the middle of the hill, and there the line of vision ends: nothing is seen beyond the fire, or the almost ironic, picturesque, rolling hills.

With "Mt. Omuro (white haze)" finishing the show, the viewer is left with a sense of sublimity: the vastness of the space beyond the landscape, although somewhat daunting, can impress a sense of endless possibility, a utopia in the mere idea of starting over. Even the fire that runs about the image can hold the connotation of destruction, the classic dystopian illustration of a world in ruins, but here, the fire clears away the old, and makes space for the new.

As the final installment of the Thompson Gallery's "Nowhere Everywhere" series, this evocative group show successfully demonstrates a large selection of art challenging the intangible idea of space, and how humanity acts within it. The art sparks genuine conversation about the ever-changing culture we are fully immersed in, and forces viewers to compare the realities of our current world to the one we're constantly laying a foundation for. Although more of the works do establish themes of dystopian nature, there is still an unshakeable, underlying message of hope: despite the hardest times the human race may ever see, the inherent, inarticulate desire to create will forever be present.

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