

Entertainment — The Arts

The gallery scene: Thrilling exhibits by Joan Tanner, Aubrey Levinthal

Updated: JANUARY 17, 2016 — 3:01 AM EST



JOAN TANNER

Joan Tanner's "donottellmewhereibelong #33," at Locks Gallery.

by Edith Newhall, For The Inquirer

Seeing Joan Tanner's magnetically strange drawings for the first time - in "Persistent Contact," a survey of her works on paper of the last 17 years, organized for Locks Gallery by the independent curator Julien Robson - I was surprised I'd never heard of her. I was even more perplexed when I went to Tanner's website and saw her equally remarkable sculptures and assemblages, none of which are in this show and at which her drawings strongly hint.

Tanner, who moved from Indianapolis to Southern California in the mid-1960s, has only occasionally exhibited her work east of the Golden State, and most of her shows have taken place in Santa Barbara (where she lives) and Los Angeles. I hope "Persistent Contact" will stir some momentum for her on the East Coast.

There are three series, and their titles are as mysterious as the intense works on paper that compose them.

In *donottellmewhereibelong*, a series made over the last two years using pencil, colored pencil, oil stick, and pastel, biomorphic forms that look derived from landscape, human sexual organs, and natural events such as tornadoes and earthquakes come together and separate, each form appearing to be tentatively checking the others out. In these, Tanner's freehand doodling is reminiscent of that of the California artist John Altoon (1925-1969), but without his cartoony humor.

Tanner's *endofred* drawings in oil stick, ballpoint, metallic powder, and chalk from 2015 depict similar forms, but they're more dramatic, exaggerated, and stretched out, Dalíesque. But her visions, if you could call them that, aren't bleak. Tanner often seems more interested in conjuring the sensuousness of her materials and her hand in them.

Drawing Focus, the earliest series here, from 1999, offers the most peculiar images - in oil stick, metallic powder, and colored inks - of forms that suggest extenuated everyday objects "framed" by a black circle or lozenge shape. One thinks of a camera lens, female genitalia, even of the body imprints the Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta made on the ground, outlined in gunpowder, and burned.

It's a shame a couple of Tanner sculptures didn't make it into this otherwise pitch-perfect show. Some are made up of multiple parts and looked hard to transport from what I could see online, which may have been a concern for Locks - but never mind. Tanner's drawings easily hold their own.

Through Jan. 30. Locks Gallery, 600 Washington Square South, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. 215-629-1000 or www.locksgallery.com.

You may have seen individual paintings by Aubrey Levinthal here and there. in group shows in Philadelphia, one at the Cerulean Gallery and another in the president's office at the University of the Arts, organized by the painter Sarah McEneaney. Now you can see a lot of them together in her first solo show, "Spaghetti for Breakfast," at Gross McCleaf Gallery.

It's an impressive debut. As in her earlier works, Levinthal presents familiar domestic interiors and would-be still lifes as scenes in flux, but it's exciting to see the broad range of situations and places she maneuvers in her compositions and the way she gets paints to behave. There are places, as in the horizontal uppermost section of her painting *Night Haze (Laptop)*, where she seems to be using a resist technique that gives her painted surface a photographic appearance. The gallery news release cites the Nabis and Matisse as Levinthal's artistic predecessors, but clearly Peter Doig and Elizabeth Osborne have also informed her art.

I was drawn to Levinthal's more reductive, minimalist efforts, such as her tiny painting *Rearview*, presumably depicting the nighttime view from a car rearview mirror; *4 a.m.* a nearly all-black painting; and *Bean Fingers*, likely her impression of an overhead light illuminating string beans on a table, but not remotely so simple.

Through Jan. 29. Gross McCleaf Gallery, 127 S. 16th St., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. 215-665-8138 or www.grossmccleaf.com.