In the galleries: A ‘Homage to Hillary’ is repurposed

By Mark Jenkins  December 15, 2016

Originally billed as a tribute to the first female president, Marsha Mateyka Gallery’s “Homage to Hillary” was retitled “8 Women” after Nov. 8. Nothing else had to change, because the work is apolitical. Nature, architecture and Chopin are among the inspirations for the contributors, all Mateyka regulars. Most are showing recent work that continues or expands on familiar motifs.

Most enthralling are three pieces by Jae Ko, who transforms rolls of paper into undulating sculptures. The local artist began by twisting these coils and coloring them black with a mix of ink and glue. She later added white and red to her palette and now, inspired by glaciers, is working in shades of shimmering blue. The forms are less regular than in her earlier work, which is intriguing, but it’s the lush color that registers most strongly.

The show’s oldest items are two photographs by Susan Eder, who poses flowers and butterflies on white backdrops; the results are both clinical and lovely. More abstractly, Kitty Klaidman celebrates textures of stone, water and tree bark in paintings on paper that further her “Salt Spring Island” series.

Also on display are Nancy Wolf’s painstakingly drawn architectural fantasies, which juxtapose old and new, and East and West; Aline Feldman’s Chopin-fueled abstract woodcut prints; Athena Tacha’s shieldlike assemblages of shells; and Sheila Rotner’s deconstructed squares, made of painted tarpaper. Where Rotner cuts exactly, Kathleen Kucka makes patterns by burning holes into canvas, which she stretches over a lower layer, usually of a complementary hue. Like Ko, Kucka is a minimalist with a sensuous touch.


Consider Yourself Illuminated

Best experienced when the sun is setting outside the darkened space, “Consider Yourself Illuminated,” at the Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery, spotlights work that pulses, shines and casts dynamic shadows. Lighting is more integral to some pieces than others, but all six participants use lamps, lightboxes or neon tubing to switch on their art.
Ani Bradberry’s “Flex” is a chain of hanging rings that dangles from a red-neon loop. Neon represents fire in Jo Ellen Walker’s “Sacred Spaces,” whose red-painted logs appear to burn inside a crib. Robin Schaefer places wax-layered prints atop lightboxes, evoking the dwindling flickers of remembrance.

Melissa Burley’s found-object collages glow from inside, using LED or halogen light whose ephemerality contrasts the mostly metallic ingredients. Her largest piece, “Bending Time,” is a seven-foot tower made of bicycle gears, piano strings and backlit glass blocks.

The show’s other magnum opus is Fabiola Alvarez Yurcisin’s “Saturated Fish Net,” a wall-filling installation made mostly of hand-stitched VHS tape, a symbol of obsolescence. A bucket filled with water is a miniature sea, while small silhouettes of Mexico and the United States represent the countries of the artist’s birth and current home, respectively. In a show dedicated to the light, this assemblage is a potent black whole.


Nikki Brugnoli &

Ajay Malghan

An abandoned silo in Warrenton, Va., gets a thorough investigation in “Above the Horizon,” Nikki Brugnoli’s show at the McLean Project for the Arts. The Virginia artist combines printing, drawing and painting, mostly on Mylar, and uses multiple perspectives to ponder the industrial structure. A metal ladder climbs the center of many of the impressionistic pictures, some of which are attached directly to the wall.

The most imposing drawings are two large ones that bulge outward, mimicking the silo’s rounded shape. They can’t convey the tower’s height, but the artist found another way to do that: a book whose connected leaves unfold horizontally until they equal the silo’s 38 vertical feet. It’s just one of the ways that Brugnoli combines the wispy and the monumental.

There’s a sense of landscape in Ajay Malghan’s “Atom City,” a photographic suite also on display. Valleys, mountains and horizon lines can be discerned in the pictures, although they’re not actually there. The Baltimore artist made the images by painting chemicals on photo paper, without camera, lens or subject. The technique yields black and gray forms, but also bright whites and shades of pink. Above the abstract territory, these hint at dawn and sunset.


Hedieh Javanshir Ilchi

Rivulets of abstract color, often vivid blues and greens, are punctuated by precise imagery in Hedieh Javanshir Ilchi’s painting and mixed-media work. The Tehran-born local artist’s show at Hemphill Fine Arts includes details derived from Iranian
manuscripts and architecture, notably gilded gates and blue-and-white floor tiles. One piece is a pile of shattered tiles, signifying both personal and cultural loss.

Ilchi shows often in the area, but this impressive survey introduces some new wrinkles. A series of diptychs employs muddier, earthier hues that partly submerge outline maps of the Middle East. A series of paintings clusters blue-green leaf forms on fiery backdrops. The leaves echo the tree shapes in the show’s largest painting, a 10-foot-wide deluge of color that suggests a flood of memories.


Elaine Florimonte
Maps also feature in Elaine Florimonte’s exuberant collage-paintings, as do dress patterns. They are among the things worked into the textured landscapes and abstractions of “Accumulation,” the Virginia artist’s show at Touchstone Gallery. The collaged elements are man-made patterns that contrast the wildness of the original subjects.

Florimonte’s pictures generally begin with a representational image, but become freer as they collect additional layers. Even the most recognizable forms are complicated by unnaturalistic colors. In a triptych of bare trees in winter, the trunks are rendered in red, implausibly yet strikingly. In the process of accumulating, the artist also transforms.


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