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exhibitions in New York and beyond.

His work tangles with the violence and the sweetness in American culture. The sculpture "A Simple Heart" leans toward the latter, a vivid relief of a cabin with an open door, surrounded by trees. There's a flower box on an upper windowsill, and a front door lamp, but the piece is nearly black; it brings to mind the deep-woods dwellings in "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Hansel and Gretel." It sits on a broken old side table, with a door falling off its hinges. The rubbings, made from Spangler's own carvings, are dense, symmetrical totems. "Anonymous No. 2" has at its center a rocket, the exhaust of which is a fanning pattern of guns. You have to scrutinize the piece to recognize its components. It's absorbing, then unnerving.

Painting truth to power

In New York in the late 1950s, the painter Boris Lurie cofounded the No! art movement, a group that spurned the art world's commercialism. As you might guess, the art world in turn spurned the No! artists, who often made dark and taunting work.

A survivor of Buchenwald, Lurie seemed to paint with a lifelong indictment of power structures. (He died in 2008.) His show at Pierre Menard Gallery is both riveting and disturbing. Much of it focuses on the dynamic between men and women, but that dynamic extrapolates outward. His most audacious works are collages that swim with images from girlie magazines.

Some of these function as subversive political declarations. For instance, "Slave (5 ave)" has text running across a shot of a woman in lingerie; the "L" has been dropped out, to turn the word slave into a reference to Manhattan's shopping mecca, 5th Avenue. And "Railroad Collage" shockingly places a clip of a woman playing peek-a-boo with her panties over an image of corpses piled in the back of a truck. The correlation between sexual enslavement and genocide is more than sobering.

At times, as in the artfully composed "Oh Mama Liberté,"



A detail from Aaron Spangler's "A Simple Heart," which brings to mind the deep-woods dwellings of fairy tales.

DANA FRANKFORT: HI
AARON SPANGLER: A Simple Heart; Der Kleiner Mann
At: LaMontagne Gallery, 555 East 2d St., South Boston, through Feb. 24. 617-464-4640, www.lamontagne-gallery.com

BORIS LURIE: No!
Prologue to a Retrospective through Feb. 25
BRUCE STUART: Oneiric Cartographies through Feb. 10
At: Pierre Menard Gallery, 10 Arrow St., Cambridge. 617-868-2033, www.pierre-menardgallery.com

the sheer density of images from girlie magazines seems as much an opportunity for the artist to get his jollies as a chance to make a statement. On the other hand, Lurie's paintings in the "Dismembered Women" series are gor-

geous, fluid, fleshy, and odd depictions of women with no torsos (save their breasts). These, too, are full of desire and repulsion, but they hold that tension evenly, leaving the viewer to grapple with it, rather than leaving the viewer feeling as if the artist hasn't grappled enough with it.

Until recently, artist Bruce Stuart was homeless. Now he's in Section 8 Housing, and his abstract drawings in ink, marker, and pencil are on view in Pierre Menard's downstairs gallery. They're otherworldly pieces, but in this medium they could be the elaborate doodles of a smart, bored, design-savvy high school kid. More about process than product, they seem to lack intention, as if they were made for the sake of making, not to be seen or sold. Boris Lurie would probably have been proud.

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The cool and bold letters of Dana Frankfort's "HI," in her show at LaMontagne Gallery.

Playful and unfettered, words transcend meaning

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Words in art have gravity; they can jabber or command attention in a painting, competing with the visual aspects of a piece. Not Dana Frankfort's. In her show at LaMontagne Gallery, the words she paints come close to signifying nothing. It's thrilling. These forms have thrown off the shackles of meaning and are running free.

Just look at "HI." The vertical

and horizontal bars of the two capital letters form a sloppy grid in pale bottle green. Frankfort paints most of the bars in thick strokes, but two verticals are spindly. The form is translucent, streaked, drippy, and it hovers over a steamy background of hot orange and pink. The letters, cool and bold in tone, are slippery, like a yummy spearmint candy melting in your mouth.

Frankfort handles paint so exuberantly, it's easy to lose sight of her technical smarts. In "TOE

NAIL" she writes the words more than once: In broad, loopy brushstrokes that rush and swerve in rose and orange over the canvas, but then again in awkward, gray-brown stalks, and again quietly whispering in pink across the pale yellow ground. The words echo and echo, but in paint, that echo is especially evanescent and sweet: not a word at all, but a sound, or not a sound, but the memory of one. Nothing at all like toenails.

Frankfort includes a couple of

landscape paintings, also garishly hued and skittering away from their declared form. "LANDSCAPE" looks like an overexposed photo of a snowfield at sunset, except that it's deliciously painterly. The artist barely defines her horizon line with a streak of orange pink; we sense the slope of a hill, the gathering weather, all in that same color. But most of the piece is white; Frankfort's spare gestures, like her assured and playful ones in the word paintings, alter what

we think we know into something else, delicious and ungraspable.

Aaron Spangler's elaborate woodcarvings and graphite rubbings, also at LaMontagne, are dense with detail, providing a weighty counterpoint to Frankfort's paintings. Spangler is a Minnesotan and a hunter; Justin Lieberman, in an essay that accompanies both shows, calls him a "backwoods hillbilly," but he has an impressive resume of

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