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Dreamers and their visions

By Diane Chin Lui | Enterprise art critic | August 11, 2008 13:21



'Flower Garden (22/231: On the Way to Ecstasy),' by Cheselyn Amato (Courtesy photo)

Two years ago, Nelson Gallery director Rennie Pritikin wanted to meet as many artists in the Northern Valley area as possible, so he organized an exhibition called 'Flatlanders,' to present a selection of their works.

This summer, Pritikin has presented a follow-up show, 'Flatlanders 2: A Regional Roundup,' which continues through Friday and features regional artists not included the first time.

The installation is refreshing and accessible, and just right for a visit during a hot summer day. Twenty artists' works are shown, down from the 45 artists showcased in 2006. The works here aren't crowded, and gallery visitors have enough room to enjoy and study each group of works.

While the resulting exhibit isn't as heavily academic in tone as the spring quarter graduate student show, each work in 'Flatlanders 2' clearly communicates its essence and originality.

Some artists depict unconventional subjects. Joshua Stern's 'Pin Series' photographs show the reflection of images on the head of a pin. The images, such as one of a reclining woman, are enlarged to a 30-by-30-inch format that startle and capture one's attention.

Uwe Jahnke's paintings use spray paint and heavily outlined figures, and are influenced by graffiti art.

Jeff Musser's oil paintings of tattoos add his own interpretation to the subject. In 'Melissa,' one foot - bearing a crucifix tattoo with roses - has been placed atop the other foot, to resemble Christ's feet when nailed to the cross. One wonders what life situations Melissa has experienced.

Other artists use unconventional mediums. Stacy Vetter paints walnut ink on paper, to create sepia-colored images of heavy petal and thick stem plants. Using red wine as a painting medium, Ken Kirsch's images appear to be faded memories of a day gone by: In 'Split,' a faded image of long-stemmed rose appears to drift downward, to produce an emotionally provocative image.

Julia Couzens created works of tape on vellum, which resemble broken gestural line drawings that keep the eye dancing around images that are at once strange and familiar. In 'April Tailings #5, the tenuous structure trembles, as if a slight wind could blow it apart.

Embroidered works by Laura Reyes, such as 'Sampler,' form images that invite closer study than if the same subjects had been drawn in pencil.

Youngsuk Suh's large color photograph depicts only small land masses in two corners, to anchor the work. A wide pastel expanse of water forms the middle plane, which envelops one in a sea of color.

Judith Geffer's color digital prints create formal portraits of flowers. David Robertson's digital images, in graphic novel format, reveal conversation bubbles that pop up next to buildings, as if the structures are talking to each other; actually, these are overheard conversations between people.

Brenda Louie's 'Troubled Rain, Series #0011,' is a large canvas dominated by a huge white and yellow chrysanthemum. Hints of hanging pots with cascading flowers and lanterns fill the background. Dark drips of paint, reminiscent of Hung Liu, form a screen of vertical lines that appear to be pollutants in an otherwise gentle and ethereal setting.

Some of the works are narratives, starting with David Hollowell's humorous and stimulating 'Interdisciplinary Studies at UC Davis': a small, detailed painting of the fertilization and cross-fertilization of new ideas that may occur in the combination of two or more disciplines.

In Sita Seng's 'Two Coffee Cups,' the coffee is still being poured. Her other paintings also provoke fleeting memories.

On a more formal level, Peter Stegall creates small-scale formal studies of color and hard-edged shapes that interact with each other. The glossy enamel colors give an added dimension to these works. Mike Henderson's intriguing black paintings, 'Bass' and 'The Open String,' first appear to be color field works. A closer viewing reveals thickly applied brushstrokes and layers of paint that form shapes, all vibrating and pulsating with a rhythmic spirit that fills the canvas with energy.

Other works give a more organic viewing experience. Gioia Fonda's meticulous and detailed drawings appear to be a colorful fabric quilt, and her images act as catalysts for mind-wandering musings. 'Sugar in the Morning' has images of the recognizable grain and marshmallow shapes of popular breakfast cereals.

Liv Moe's carefully composed wall sculptures, using artificial flowers and vegetables - and wigs - make one pause and re-think the definition of art. Consider 'Potatoes,' with foam potatoes floating in a wig, or 'Curls with Strawberries and Zinnias,' reminding us of Victorian hair wreath memorials.

Cheselyn Amato created vibrant and colorful bouquets of floral sculptures in 'Flower Garden.' Using fabric, bamboo, pipes and fittings, Amato formed flowers with many stories to tell. Some look like headdresses, like one with an Israeli flag and a Palestinian keffiyeh. The cheerful garden invites us to discover hidden messages and meanings.

James Aarons's earthenware plates present elegant designs of fine lines of glaze, drawn on a curved surfaces. Linda Fitz Gibbon's sculpture 'Birch,' a log standing on end, resembles a figure strolling down the street. On top, a green oak leaf appears to be a head bent in greeting, while the figure's arm gently sways in the light summer breeze ... although the title hints of something more sinister.

An exhibition catalogue, available for purchase, allows us to bring home these intriguing and innovative images by our regional artists.