

Museums

In the galleries: Three artists become one

By Mark Jenkins

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Near the entrance to Glen Echo's Popcorn Gallery, three paintings made individually by Mei Mei Chang, Pat Goslee and Kathryn McDonnell reveal the local artists' compatibility. They each make abstractions that pit hard lines vs. soft color, and precise forms against drips, swirls and other spontaneous gestures. But "Fields of Inquiry" goes beyond that affinity with two collaborations by the trio. Intriguingly, one is deliberate and the other impressionistic.

"Crystal Tear Garden" is a 8-foot-long floor sculpture that resembles the stone-and-raked-gravel arrangements that represent mountains and sea at Zen temples, most famously Kyoto's Ryoan-ji. But the artists have substituted battered pieces of found metal for the stones and rock salt for the gravel. (Salt is used in purification rituals by Japan's other ancient religion, Shinto.) The effect is jarring at first, yet ultimately serene. Despite its junkyard elements, the piece can still be seen as a contemplation of nature.

The other co-production is "Floating Worlds," a painting that's almost as wide as the trio's salt garden. The complex but fluid picture combines Chang's ethereal spirals, Goslee's bodily forms and McDonnell's more geometric shapes. Of course, it's impossible to say for sure which artist contributed which components, or if the three melded so closely that separating their contributions is impossible. One of the benefits of a successful collaboration is losing yourself in the whole.

Fields of Inquiry: Mei Mei Chang, Pat Goslee, Kathryn McDonnell On view through March 27 at Popcorn Gallery, 7300 MacArthur Blvd., Glen Echo, Md. 301-634-2222. glenechopark.org/exhibitions .

Park & Winkler

In separate Hamiltonian Gallery shows that dovetail conceptually, Nara Park and Dane Winkler consider links between nature and technology. The entrance is through Park's "Between Millions of Years," which stacks transparent plastic boxes in emulation of a rocky gorge in an Australian national park. It's not exactly a grand canyon, since the building blocks are commonplace, unnatural and scaled to a gallery, not to all outdoors. And yet the narrow passageway does produce a strong sense of place.

Inspired by his farm upbringing, the prolific Winkler makes burly sculptures that combine the industrial and the agricultural. His "Homesteading" includes metal hooks, cables, pulleys and barrels, contrasted with animal products: lard, raw sheep's wool and a pile (partially) of manure. Unlike some sculptors who work with large pieces of metal, Winkler doesn't assemble them abstractly. His pieces appear to be functional, even

if any possible purpose is obscure. What's poignant about his work is its commentary on humans' use of other animals. In his sculptures, remnants of living creatures become equivalent to such bloodless materials as sand, straw and iron.

Nara Park: Between Millions of Years and Dane Winkler: Homesteading On view through March 26 at Hamiltonian Gallery, 1353 U St. NW, Suite 101. 202-332-1116. hamiltoniangallery.com.

Holly Bass

The world that D.C. poet, performer and visual artist Holly Bass has constructed at BlackRock Center for the Arts includes a lot of old wood. "Root Work" features a bit of battered fencing, well-worn mirror frames mounted on the wall and stacks of old crates. But those boxes conceal video projectors, and the mirrors are covered by chiffon sheets on which photos have been printed. To convey the past, Bass uses the modern as much as the aged.

"Root" refers both to ancestry and agriculture, and thus to African American life in the South. Wood-framed outlines of houses suggest modest rural homes, and also serve as supports for fluttering sheets that double as projection screens. In one video, the artist's father discusses his after-school job as a cotton picker; in another, Bass dances and chants a field song, wearing a vintage pair of work boots. A few such remnants conjure an entire heritage, one that may be just a single generation gone but that is receding rapidly.

Holly Bass: Root Work On view through March 26 at BlackRock Center for the Arts, 12901 Town Commons Dr., Germantown, Md. 301-528-2260. blackrockcenter.org/galleries/current-exhibits. Bass will be giving a free artist talk at the center on March 26 at 12:30 p.m.

Alattar, Johnson and Reed

Abstraction arises from many impulses, as three current shows illustrate. Lina Alattar's soft-edged paintings evoke mood and personal history. Carol Reed's mixed-media works are studies in contrast, of texture as well as form and color. Erick Johnson's paintings are derived from photographs, but those origins vanish during a rigorous distillation process.

The misty canvases in Alattar's "Embracing Abstraction," at Hillyer Art Space, employ pastel colors and splashes of brighter hues, frequently off to one side. But the dominant shade is often gray, layered over the others. This could signify a world enshrouded in clouds or smoke, but the Fairfax-based artist writes that her concerns include "rootlessness." Perhaps that's why her pictures seem to be snapshots of visual improvisations that could go any which way.

Reed's "not just black or white," at Susan Calloway Fine Arts, does include much black, whether in bold forms, spindly lines or patterns derived from paisley, brocade or herringbone. The local artist uses paint, ink, charcoal and pencil, as well as collage, to build compositions that have solid central motifs but also much

that's wispy and impromptu. The show's title refers to color accents in such luxurious colors as gold, crimson and turquoise, which evoke jewelry and ceramics.

The title of Johnson's "Streets for Evermore" is from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" but also is a reference to the New Yorker's method. The paintings at Gallery Neptune & Brown are inspired by his semi-abstract sidewalk photos, which are simplified to charcoal drawings and gouache paintings. The final step produces oils of neatly arrayed color blocks, which are sanded to reveal substrata and produce streaks that suggest motion (as do titles such as "Thataway" and "Double Back"). If Johnson's work is no more representational than Alattar's or Reed's, his zooming rectangles possess an energy that seems specifically urban.

Lina Alattar: Embracing Abstraction On view through March 26 at Hillyer Art Space, 9 Hillyer Ct. NW. 202-338-0680. hillyerartspace.org.

Carol Reed: not just black or white On view through March 26 at Susan Calloway Fine Arts, 1643 Wisconsin Ave. NW. 202-965-4601. callowayart.com.

Erick Johnson: Streets for Evermore On view through March 26 at Gallery Neptune & Brown, 1530 14th St. NW. 202-986-1200. neptunefineart.com.

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