

IN THE GALLERIES

# The spaces between technology, humans and nature

BY MARK JENKINS

If the artistic process is more interesting than the outcome, as some modernists hold, then the greatest artist is nature itself. Its systems are endless and inexorable, even if the results aren't always impressive to the naked eye. Take, for example, the fungal experiments of Selin Balci, one of five former Hamiltonian Artists fellows who return to the gallery in "Empirical Evidence." The Turkey-born Marylander is exhibiting such seemingly inert items as petri dishes that contain slowly evolving mold spores. Far more dramatic is a more artist-directed piece, a five-minute fast-motion video in which molds spread across a world map. It demonstrates the power and scope of the tiniest living things.

Among Billy Friebele's materials is a natural substance that's less likely to expand than recede: ice. The D.C. artist makes "ice drawings" by allowing the stuff to melt atop inkjet prints. His "Decomposition 1," whose creation-by-disintegration was documented during a recent five-hour live video feed, is among several pieces to feature a Friebele photograph of glacier-free Indonesia. The artist is also showing two videos of liquids in motion, illustrating his technique as well as a universe in flux.

Working mostly with photographic media, Rachel Guardiola depicts and distorts topography. The Colorado artist and naturalist purposefully interferes with ordinary ways of seeing. Her contributions include a set of photos of dry terrain, with a section of the image excerpted or highlighted, and a landscape video originally shot on 16mm film that's been physically and chemically abused. The goal is to transform real-world locations into what her statement terms "environments of the uncanny."

The ecologies charted in Jing (Ellen) Xu's drawings and sculptural paintings are not literal, but do sometimes



An installation view of "Empirical Evidence" at Hamiltonian Artists, featuring work by, from left, Jing (Ellen) Xu, Rachel Guardiola and Selin Balci.

VIVIAN DOERING

resemble phenomena that might be spied through a macro lens. The China-born New Yorker uses ink or a paint-and-clay mixture, usually in shades of red, to conjure interior processes and thoughts. Her largest piece fuses macro and micro: It's a coiled 30-foot scroll adorned with tiny, subtle marks, evoking traditional

Chinese painting but with vocabulary that is Lee's alone. Katherine Tzu-Lan Mann is the most conventional of the five participants, at least in her choice of media. The Washington artist paints, usually on paper and often on a mammoth scale, with acrylic pigment and sumi ink. The ink links Mann's style to

historical Chinese painting, as does her nature imagery. Yet the crowded, layered pictures are mostly abstract. Mann begins by pouring pigment to make random patterns, which are then amended and extrapolated, partly by collage. That synthesis — of flowing and improvisational with hard-

edged and precise — yields tableaux that are dynamic and distinctive. The two Mann panoramas in "Empirical Evidence" — the larger almost 12 feet wide — are among the show's highlights. Anyone smitten with these sweeping pictures can easily find more, if not quite so expansive,

examples at Morton Fine Art. The biggest offering is the title piece, "Water Ribbon," a rare vertical composition that's 7½ feet high. Many of the other pictures are, unusually for Mann, square or nearly so. Although they still suggest landscapes, such pictures as "Arch 3" have a stronger central focus than is

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## IN THE GALLERIES

typical of the artist's style. Rather than meander every which way, Mann's latest water ribbons coalesce into dazzling wholes.

**Empirical Evidence** Through Nov. 13 at Hamiltonian Artists, 1353 U St. NW.

**Katherine Tzu-Lan Mann: Water Ribbon** Through Oct. 6 at Morton Fine Art, 52 O St. NW, No. 302.

## Storytelling

Featured in Gallery Neptune & Brown's show are two sets of bold expressionist prints by William Kentridge that illustrate scenes from Alfred Jarry's "Ubu Roi" or Frank Wedekind's "The Lulu Plays." Yet such literary rendering isn't exactly what the gallerists mean by "Storytelling," the title of the nine-artist exhibition. On display are sequences of prints that develop various themes or narratives, some of them purely visual.

Furthest from Kentridge's heavy black strokes are the faint colored dashes that Christiane Baumgartner clusters into soft, pastel clouds and the equally abstract and minimalist but more diverse patterns that Linda Schwarz constructs from faint gray marks. Just as elliptical, if more hard-edged, are Peter Downsbrough's prints of single rust-red bars flanked by shards of black sans-serif letters and much empty space. All three series arrange simple elements to suggest boundless possibilities.

The two photo-based series juxtapose high-contrast photos of women with bright, single-hued backgrounds. The Black performers of Mickalene Thomas's "Trois Divas" are adorned with hand-applied rhinestones, while Adam Pendleton offers three impressions of the same film still, overprinted with red, lime or gray so dark it nearly eclipses the image. Again, the sequences demonstrate multiple ways to see the same essential thing, even if one of those ways is to see it hardly at all.

## Storytelling: Artist Portfolios

Through Oct. 16 at Gallery Neptune & Brown, 1530 14th St. NW.



JARRETT HENDRIX

Katherine Tzu-Lan Mann's works are displayed at Morton Fine Art. She usually paints on paper and often on a mammoth scale, with acrylic pigment and sumi ink.



GALLERY NEPTUNE &amp; BROWN

Adam Pendleton's "Not Against the Memories," one of three screen prints.



LOST ORIGINS GALLERY

"In the Pines," part of Kate Samworth's series of scratchboard drawings.

## Kate Samworth

A slightly, but only slightly, more orthodox style of storytelling prevails in Kate Samworth's show at Lost Origins Gallery, "In the Pines." The bulk of the exhibition consists of digital prints of charming illustrations from the title fable about a girl who lives in an enchanted forest. She communes with assorted animals and appears to become particularly close to an easygoing bear. The pictures don't tell the full story, if there is one, but establish a beguiling mood.

Samworth's principal medium is scratchboard, a style of drawing that's effectively engraving. The Takoma Park, Md., artist scrapes off black ink to craft exceptionally detailed renderings that are mostly dark

but beautifully illuminated by white strokes. It's an ideal method to portray a shadowy forest accented by shafts of sunlight — especially one inhabited by a girl and her woodland friends.

Even more eccentric, and just as intriguing, are a few full-color gouaches from a surreal adventure in which Charles Willson Peale, the early American naturalist and painter, journeys into art history, encountering Frida Kahlo and a Hieronymus Bosch landscape. Peale's eventual destination is even harder to fathom than the girl's, but these witty paintings make the trip seem well worth following.

## Kate Samworth: In the Pines

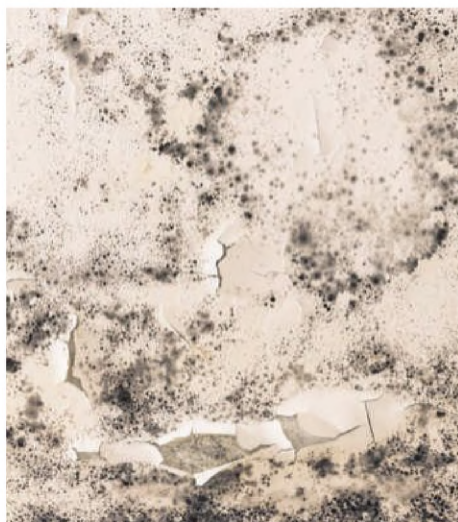
Through Oct. 17 at Lost Origins Gallery, 3110 Mt. Pleasant St. NW.

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