

IN THE GALLERIES

Turning pedestrian objects into alluring art

BY MARK JENKINS

The world is not a gallery, with the most striking vignettes hung neatly at eye level. All photographers know that, but María Luz Bravo makes a particular point of it with “Glimpse, Gathered.”

Her Hamiltonian Artists show simulates 360-degree vision by placing pictures up, down and around: stuck to the floor, bent from floor to wall, or mounted above the average visitor's eye line. There are also four video screens, whether horizontal or vertical, that offer quivery views of such aerial phenomena as birds on a wire or a white streak across a blue sky.

The Mexico-born Washingtonian captured these glimpses while strolling the residential precincts of D.C.'s Northwest quadrant. The pictures' vantage points are as pedestrian as their subjects, which include leaves, concrete driveways and a luminous coral sky. One of Bravo's themes is the place of nature in the wooded but semi-urbanized neighborhoods, for which she found a serendipitous visual metaphor: a blue bird lying still on the ground, immobile not because it's dead, but because it's a sheet of origami-folded paper.

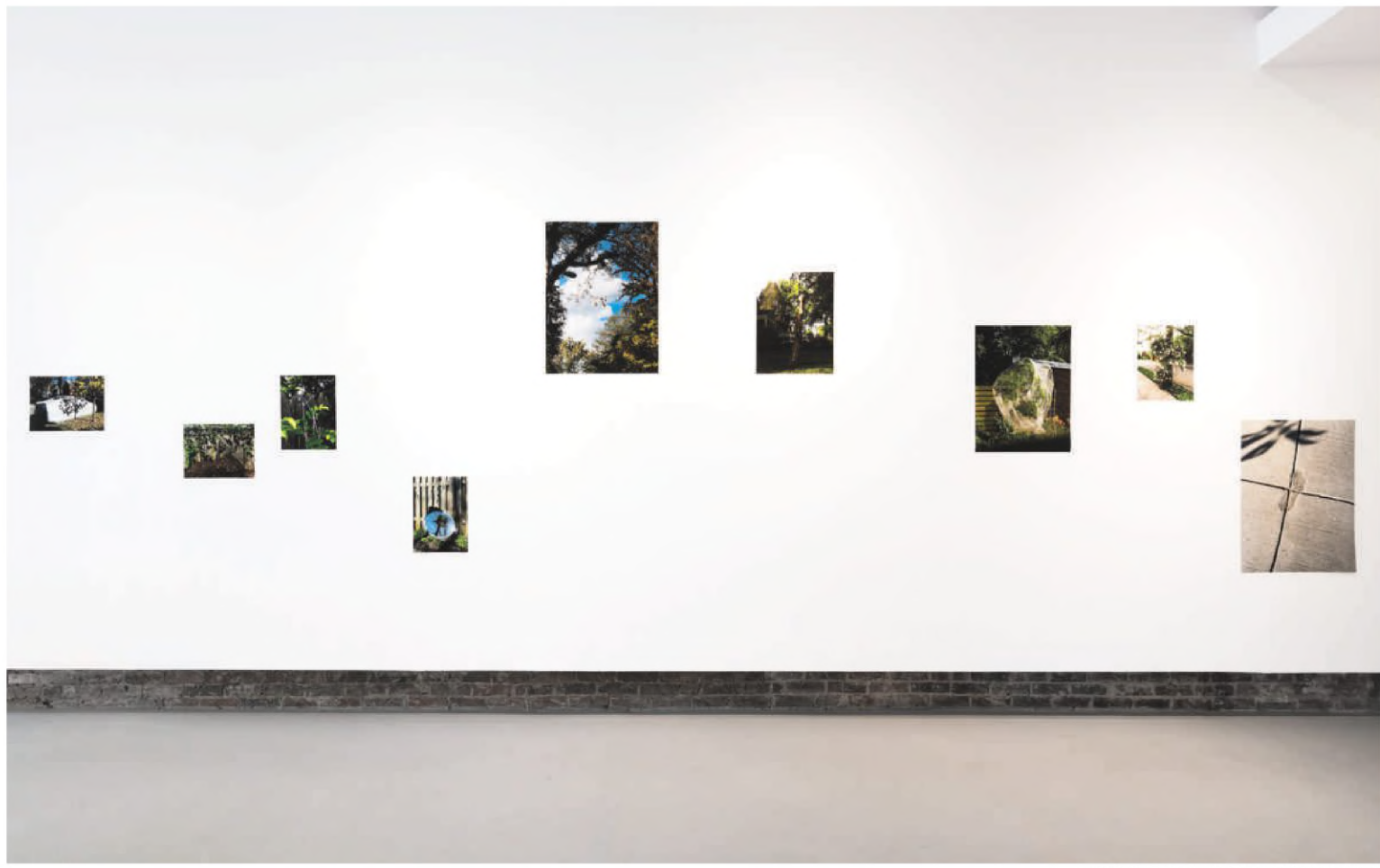
Bravo's principal interest seems to be ephemerality. One video uses superimposition to make a plastic bag fluttering in the wind appear even less substantial than it is, and the artist is just as likely to photograph the shadow or reflection of an object as the thing itself. Context-free details hint at unknown circumstances, and subjects are often tightly framed by trees or gaps in walls, so they can recount only fragmentary stories. The discoveries Bravo photographs are physical but sometimes so insubstantial that they feel illusory.

María Luz Bravo: Glimpse, Gathered Through April 22 at Hamiltonian Artists, 1353 U St. NW.

Perceptible Rhythms/Alternative Temporalities

Whether cracked, stony or swaddled in plastic, the parched earth seen in Nadia Bseiso's color photographs exemplifies the title she has given her entire series: “Unfertile Crescent.” The Jordanian artist's pictures are one of three sets of documentary images in the MEI Art Gallery's “Perceptible Rhythms/Alternative Temporalities,” a 12-artist show that ponders the effects of climate change and environmental degradation in the Middle East and South Asia.

Some of Bseiso's photos offer the solace of water, and agriculture-themed vistas of the Arabian peninsula by the UAE's Moza Almatrooshi include heartening glimmers of green. But Egyptian Mohamed Mahdy's stark black-and-white pictures of a section of Alexandria plagued by industrial dust depict nothing but toxic grime



An installation view of María Luz Bravo's exhibition “Glimpse, Gathered,” where works are displayed to simulate 360-degree vision.



NADIA BSEISO



LISA BATTLE/STUDIO GALLERY

LEFT: Nadia Bseiso's “Jordan Valley, Jordan” in the show “Perceptible Rhythms/Alternative Temporalities.” ABOVE: Sculptor Lisa Battle's “Transcend,” included in her exhibit “Portals & Passages” at Studio Gallery.

imaginary scientific diagrams and an industrial form of quilting.

Also in the show are examples of two other series, the vertically oriented “Strata” and the smaller, square-formatted “Crossing Lines.” The latter set is inspired by literal as well as figurative lines, the artist writes, including headlines and bloodlines. The pictures appear methodical yet incorporate gestures that are soft and clearly intuitive. The reliance on metal panels and leaf doesn't prevent Hester from employing a gossamer touch.

Francie Hester: Confluence Through April 23 at Fred Schnider Gallery of Art, 888 N. Quincy St., Arlington.

Lisa Battle

Solid yet open — often literally — Lisa Battle's ceramic sculptures evoke apertures both physical and abstract. The largest piece in “Portals & Passages,” the artist's Studio Gallery show, consists of 21 bars of fired clay in varying lengths, rippled like little frozen waves. Each segment is self-contained, but they're arranged in a ring so they define a sort of window. Although there's nothing visible on the white wall within the circle, the seemingly heavy ceramic elements outline an area of lightness and symbolic possibility.

Not all the show's smaller pieces contain openings, but many do. Holes, slits and clefts are common, surrounded by clay inscribed with organic patterns. The elegant “Radiance,” for example, suggests a slice of a large mushroom. Battle encourages such interpretations with finishes in earthy or metallic browns, tans and greens; these hues are mottled by the effects of wood-fired kiln, adding another natural aspect to the creations. The sculptures can be seen as representing “the transition from one stage of life to another,” according to Battle's statement, but they're grounded in eternal qualities of earth and fire.

Lisa Battle: Portals & Passages Through April 22 at Studio Gallery, 2108 R St. NW.

and its consequences, including a chest X-ray and child tethered to a ventilation device.

Taking an overhead view of the same area, fellow Egyptian Marianne Fahmy produces a hypothetical future rendering of what may become a permanently flooded Nile Delta. Saudi Arabia's Abdunnasser Gharem's world map, defined by thousands of rubber-stamped impressions, highlights areas with large numbers of climate refugees. Pakistan's Ali Kazim evokes an earlier collapse with watercolor studies of the terra cotta remains of the Indus Valley culture that failed about 3,500 years ago.

A few artists focus on the region's flora. Abbas Akhavan, a Tehran-born Canadian, memorializes Iraq's native plants with cast-bronze reproductions displayed clinically on a white sheet. Airier and more luminous are Sarah Abu Abdallah's rows of translucent tomatoes made of clear resin embedded with seeds. These may appear hopeful, but the seeds are from a variety of tomato once grown in the Saudi artist's home province but now functionally extinct. Nature and

civilization bloom and wither side by side.

Perceptible Rhythms/Alternative Temporalities Through April 28 at MEI Art Gallery, 1763 N St. NW.

Francie Hester

In Francie Hester's drawing-like paintings, multicolored lines connect circles filled with diverse patterns, and blocks and columns are constructed of tightly spaced pinstripes in many hues. Just as important as the forms painted with acrylic and wax, though, are the bases to which they're applied: aluminum panels whose metallic sheen is sometimes amplified by aluminum leaf. The pictures in Hester's “Confluence” series, on display at Fred Schnider Gallery of Art, are as much sculpture as painting.

The artist, who divides her time between Colorado and suburban Maryland, works and reworks, building up and then sanding and scraping away. The technique, according to her statement, “interrelates with imperfections of recollection.” Hard-edged yet improvisational, Hester's artworks suggest both



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