



ART & MUSEUMS



Artistic visions of 5 women converge at Pittsburgh Center for the Arts

KURT SHAW

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Currently at Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, five solo exhibits — all containing artwork created by talented women — fill both floors, offering a wide variety of contemporary viewpoints.

The first one visitors will come to is an installation of photographs based on one subject, salt.

The pieces in this aptly titled exhibit, "Salt, Paper," are photographs of salt crystals, which Christine Lorenz grew in her Squirrel Hill home. "A few years ago, one of my kids wanted to grow salt crystals for a science project, and I was struck by the way the crystals looked like galaxies when I photographed them," Lorenz explains.

Since then, Lorenz has been captivated by the wide variety of forms that the crystals take.

"They seem to always want to grow towards a goal of perfect cubes, but something always interrupts them," she says.

Some of the prints in this show, like "Salt 9372m," are mounted and trimmed to shapes that are suggested by the shapes the salt crystals form. Others are printed two-sided and folded in a sort of abstract origami.

In the gallery next to Lorenz's work hang new works by Shadyside artist Stephanie Armbruster in her solo exhibit, "What hath night to do with sleep?"

Each of the abstract paintings in this exhibit was inspired by travel. "Over the past year, I have visited more than 19 cities, primarily for my work as a higher education marketing consultant," Armbruster explains. "When I'm not traveling for work, I also seek opportunities to travel for fun."

For example, "Speak Your Name by the Secret Door" was inspired by her first trip to Berlin last September. "I had never been to Europe and had always wanted to cross an ocean. The trip did not disappoint and left me with many fond memories of new friends and cities by night," Armbruster says.

Comprised of oil paint and cold wax on paper, the piece is one of many included in the show that represents a completely new way of working for the artist.

"For the past several years I have focused almost exclusively on encaustic painting, and it's been a wonderful experience to embrace a new medium," Armbruster says. "I plan to continue to develop this mixed medium process with future works."

Also working abstractly on paper is Amy Schissel. Currently living in Morgantown, she is an assistant professor of painting at West Virginia University.

Schissel says the works in her exhibition "New World Order: OS" can be seen as great big maps. "They are actually an exploration of ways that we understand or move through space in the digital era."

For example, the largest of them is 40 feet long, 8 feet wide, and consists of an obsessively detailed double-sided drawing created with graphite, acrylic, charcoal and ink on paper.

Schissel says she learned to read a traditional folded paper map and use a compass at a young age

on family trips. "Prior to the digital era, the way of experiencing and navigating oneself in space was pretty straightforward," Schissel says. "Now we can walk around with our cellphones and tablets, and are able to experience several spaces at once, including virtual and synthetic spaces, as physical space is interpenetrated with digital information.

By mixing the traditional language of cartography, with elements of digital mapping, Schissel creates fictional spaces that address both physical and digital worlds.

In a gallery next to Schissel's work hangs abstract paintings by Brookline-based Desiree Palermo in her solo exhibit "Fleeting Elation."

Wanting to create a sense of appreciation for the process of abstract painting, Palermo created pieces like "White Russian" where the painting extends beyond the canvas, onto the wall.

"There are so many times when I'm creating art where I want to stop and capture what is happening on the canvas — whether it's paint running into another object, spilling off the canvas or blending into another area of color," says the artist, who works for Propel Charter Schools as a high school visual art teacher.

"This body of work is my attempt to capture those interactions, and allowing the painting to come off of the canvas," Palermo says.

Finally, the work of ceramic artist Laura Jean McLaughlin injects a bit of brevity with her exhibit "Shards in Leotards." It's filled with playful ceramic sculptures, such as "Bliss" which features a romantic couple kissing.

McLaughlin says she has recently become interested in reassembling and re-creating artwork by dripping glazes, adding marbles and refiring often found ceramic pieces back together in the kiln.

"I like to call them mosaic sculptures because there are lots of random pieces, sometimes broken, sometimes repurposed, but almost always given a new life and second chance by becoming part of a new, hopefully, interesting sculpture," says the artist, who lives in O'Hara and maintains a studio on Penn Avenue in Garfield.

"It is almost like being a mad scientist, relying on my intuition to glaze and re-assemble pieces, not knowing what the outcome will be until I open the kiln," she says. "That is where the real excitement is for me in the creative process."

Kurt Shaw is the Tribune-Review art critic.

DETAILS

Solo shows

Featuring: Stephanie Armbruster, Christine Lorenz, Desiree Palermo, Amy Schissel and Laura Jean McLaughlin

When: Through Oct. 29; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, noon-4 p.m. Sundays.

Admission: \$5 suggested donation; free for Pittsburgh Filmmakers and Pittsburgh Center for the Arts members

Where: Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, 6300 Fifth Ave., Shadyside

Details: 412-361-0873 or www.pittsburgharts.org

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