

Art Review

The Locals III, by Roanna Forman

Malden Artists featured at
artSPACE@16



Lazarus, Bartek Walicki

In the LOCALS: III, artSPACE@16 presents the work of five talented and diverse Malden artists, all with different thematic directions. What distinguishes this show, curated by Sand T, is variety and quality. John Rodzvilla, who often works in series, offers “Growth Series” and “Roots and Rhizomes.” The former, a mixed media piece, is several vinyl records painted white. Black abstract designs drawn with ink and paint might be grapes, or trees, plants, clouds, overgrown mushroom, dragon tails, fish, curlicues, cells, or disease cells under a microscope. A million different takes on what the form represents come to mind, as it replicates through the series, filling part of one disc, a third of the next one, and so on. The titles, like “Reach Out and Touch Me” or “Funny Bunny Boy,” are taken from the tunes on the records themselves; they have no connection to the artwork painted on them. That’s good. With “Roots and Rhizomes,” inspired by underground growth sustained during winter, Rodzvilla’s symbolizing the creative process that nurtures ideas in the unconscious so that they shoot up later. His clever use of text from books to construct leaf and root patterns shows you that he’s a writer, and words are key idea conveyors for him. The pieces are covered over with black lacquer.

Kelvy Bird goes within, to the self, and without, to relationships with others – and with viewers. These paintings, entirely abstract, usually play with hue, texture and design very subtly to draw the viewer to a quiet meditation point. They take some getting used to, because their variations within the composition are so subtle, but ultimately a viewer feels, as Bird intended, drawn in to reflect on what they mean, because they are not representational but interact with the viewer’s unconscious.

In contrast, Bartek Walicki, originally from Poland, roots his art in response to the world around him – working through his reaction to current events and politics, particularly the violence and turmoil in key world hot spots, elements of pop culture, and cinema. He’s the only artist in the show who goes into wider society for his material. This may or may not be his because of his nationality. Europeans cannot avoid mutual awareness and interaction with many surrounding nations.

Within Walicki’s work for this show, there are contrasts. He usually works large, and the paintings here, though not huge, are 32” x 40” “collage-derivative” pieces, playing with intertwined shapes in companion colors like mint and grey. The small-scale etchings (2” x 3”) for which gallery owner

Sand T thoughtfully provides a magnifying glass on a specially installed shelf, are “nightmares” based on cinema like “The Seventh Seal,” “Hotel Rwanda,” and “Black Orpheus,” or real-life horror stories like events in the Middle East. Whether they’re heads being lopped off or skulls dancing in the frame filled by a huge snake, these provocative etchings are grotesquely fun, possibly due to the scale, which makes them less frightening.

Splashes of color based on patterned fabrics make Carolina Pachon’s canvases lively. Her major challenge is examining “how patterns alter the placement of planes,” and the result is effective undulation and projection through pattern and color that keep the eye moving and make for exciting abstractions.

When you consider M. Steve McCauley, everything quiets down. McCauley works with cloth primarily, either hand-embroidering or stitching patterns like whorls, straight-lines, or free form. Here, the act is the art as much as the finished piece. Stitching puts the artist into a meditative state, and helps her transform “the mundane” into art. Using cloth, she feels, helps in that transformation, taking the material on everyone’s bodies and pushing it to another level of expression. Shapes emerge like circular mandalas, Buddhist/Hinduist symbol of death and rebirth, DNA double helixes, abstractions of thoughts forming into ideas. They validate the transcendent possibilities of materials around us.

The LOCALS: III runs through March 11 at artSPACE@16, Director Sand T, 16 Princeton Road, Malden, 781-321-8058, www.artSPACEat16.com. Gallery hours are February 18, March 4, and March 11 from 12:00-5:00 PM. Potluck reception February 18 12:00-3:00, with artists’ talk beginning at 1:00. The gallery will be closed for intermission February 25.