

GALLERY REVIEW

impersonature



impersonature by Leigh Hall

at
artSPACE@16
A NON-COMMERCIAL GALLERY
16 Princeton Road, Malden MA 02148
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June 18 – July 16

Nature-themed exhibit impersonating, mimicking, rendering,
personifying, or embodying an aspect of Nature.
Installations, sculptures, mixed media works and paintings.
Artists: Leigh Hall, Kim Salerno, Marcella Anna Stasa, Dustin Tracy, and Jamie Vasta
Hours: Sat. 12:00-5:00 PM and by appt.

The height of summer is a great time for an exhibit on the relationship of five very different artists to Nature.

So go see "impersonature," at artSPACE@16 in Malden – you don't have much time, because the show ends on July 16.

You'll enter to Leigh Hall's 26 x 7 ½ foot black and white piece, a huge blown-up line drawing of grass, vines, and plants. This installation took three days to mount, done with software that isolated the lines of a photograph which could then be enlarged to scale. The artist strung up guidelines, and covered them over with strips of masking tape. The size of the drawing says a lot about Ms. Hall's one-time fascination with the biosciences. Looking at it, you have the sensation of being at the other end of a huge microscope, inspecting the curlicue stalks and spear-headed stems as they wind up and around the walls. At the same time you feel dwarfed by the magnified power of natural beauty.

In Kim Salerno's hands, naturalism and realism are malleable cultural concepts examined through the media, coloration and style of her paintings. First of all, just which culture's landscape motifs are "real?" Chinese screen painting, Islamic background patterns, the Hudson River School? They're all here, sediment-like, laid down with foam, pipe cleaners, sand, sequins. And the "real" colors of nature? The bright greens, lemon yellows and fiery oranges you see in these paintings show you how arbitrary a culture's decisions on "realism" are. And who makes

those decisions – men, that you'd see in traditional landscape painting from which these motifs are taken - or women, who work in the colors of these paintings, and embellish the layers, as the artist has done, with crafts items?

Decay, a part of Nature, and contamination, an assault on it, are themes of Marcella Anna Stasa's work, small-scale pieces using artificial and natural found objects, all of them collaborators in a struggle with the environment. Hanging strings of dried pellets connected to rusty bedsprings have the eerie appearance of a tainted version of the native American dreamcatcher. Yet, for all the decay here, the collective positive power of these pieces is that life persists in them, until death overtakes them, in today's environment.

With found pieces of plywood, Dustin Tracy creates sculptures about what's under the surface of things and people - jagged complexity or smooth, joined compartments. Separating into layers the plywood he finds by wetting, chiseling, and prying, he will create structures that are "reflections of our desire to be seen as civilized and orderly beings despite much evidence to the contrary." We bend and shape with our will, as Tracy has done, but the truths underneath are apparent, as these sculptures show.

The works of Jamie Vasta, painted with glitter and glue, "the Hudson River School tarted up in costume jewelry," are scenes of natural disaster, like fires, that mesmerize the viewer. Using glitter was a great technical comment on how these events rivet our attention – they're horrifying, but they're beautiful, too. These provocative paintings are an interesting complement to the other works in the show.

Roanna Forman, Malden Muse

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