

Northern Virginia Art Beat



By Kevin Mellema

Thursday, July 30 2009 02:48:34 PM

Corporeal Art

In The Flesh II, at Target Gallery (in the Torpedo Factory), 105 N. Union St., Alexandria. The event runs through August 30. The gallery is open Monday – Saturday, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., with extended evening hours on Thursdays until 9 p.m. For more details, call 703-838-456, ext. 4, or see www.torpedofactory.org/galleries/target.htm.

Note: Reception with juror's talk will be held Thursday, Aug. 13, from 5 – 6 p.m.

This being the second figure show at Target Gallery in as many years, we can only hope it's become an annual show in their rotation. While there have been a string of figure shows around town of late, the one at the Phillips Collection is the best show about the act of painting. While the Target Gallery show isn't as well executed as all those canvases by the likes of de Kooning, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon (not much is), the Target Gallery show hits harder on a purely psychological level. They're both great shows to catch. The Phillips show will teach you how to paint, and the Target show will teach you how to think. They work well together. The Phillips show you absolutely have to see in person because it's largely about the physicality of the paint itself, which doesn't come across well in photos of the work.



Alison Oaks' "Bruise and Bra." (Photo: Courtesy Target Gallery)

While figure shows may emphasize the nude human form, in this case it simply means people are the subject matter. There is nudity here, but not much. More importantly, it's what they're doing, and how they're doing it that makes this show sing. Where the Phillips show is largely about the act of painting, the Target Gallery show is mostly about the psychological states of the subjects.

"Censored" by Ann Piper (of Pennsylvania) depicts a nude female torso holding up a chain of black paper cut-out dolls in front of her. The row of identical dolls forms a sort of screen which blocks our view, and seems to block her thinking. Yet another perfectly normal and healthy looking woman tortures herself for not fitting the cookie-cutter ideal, because the cookie-cutter ideal isn't normal.

Lauren Scott (of New Jersey) has an oil painting of two adolescent girls looking towards the viewer, and off the picture field, as if some parental/authority figure has suddenly walked in on them in the midst of teenage goofiness. Seated side by side, one comically appears to have a tea kettle strapped to the top of her head as if it were a crown, a helmet, or who knows what. Which is no doubt what the viewer is trying to scope out. The teens have no intention of answering any questions on their own without prodding. Their first response is likely to be "What?... nothing... we were just sitting here...."

The Charcoal drawing titled "Mike's Dilemma," by Georgia's Jeff Markowsky, depicts a world-weary

middle-aged man resting against a wall covered with childhood drawings - namely a jet, dragon, mouse, and a little boy that may in fact be his younger fantasy-prone, playful self. Resting against the wall with a long-handled sledge hammer across his knee, he's likely here to knock down the wall both literally and figuratively behind him. The little boy on the wall comes to life and reaches out to unplug the power chord plugged into the wall. It's a playful mischievous act of self preservation. To destroy the wall is to destroy a bit of himself, and at the moment he doesn't seem to have the heart to do it. He may ultimately rise and destroy the childhood aspects that the adult working world asks him to, but at the moment he's not ready. From the looks of him, right about now he needs that childhood playfulness more than ever.

A graphite drawing by Missouri's J. Brett Grill titled "Palsy" is a delicate portrait. Resting, or sleeping with mouth agape and relaxed, we instantly recognize the severe overbite, and receding lower jaw of the severely handicapped. It's a quiet reverential picture that pays homage to one who deals with daily challenges and struggles that most of us accomplish without even thinking about it. (The delicacy of the drawing starkly contrasting with the brutality of their lot in life.)

Susan Kaprov of New York shows her digital pigment print with colored pencil work, titled "Larger Than Life #3" the color portrait of a screaming baby. The image immediately recalls the work of Los Angeles photographer Jill Greenberg, and her "End Time" photo series of screaming and bawling kids (<http://kopeikingallery.com/exhibitions/view/end-times>). Children have a purity of emotion that can at times be quite funny in its extreme. A small bump can have them wailing as if they'd lost a limb. Greenberg gave kids lollipops and then snatched them away, let the kids rip, shot them at full song and then gave the candy back to them. A brief injustice, but hardly a big deal in the grand scheme of things. Be that as it may, Greenberg found herself in the midst of a PR whirlwind over the whole thing. Some going so far as to accuse her of child abuse. Mind you, kids are capable of screaming like this just because they're tired. It's the purity of emotion that gives the work its power, and for some its revulsion. The same goes for Kaprov's portrait of a screaming baby, the mouth a seemingly anatomically impossible hole in the middle of its face. Devoting every fiber of its being to the task of making noise by screaming at the top of its lungs.

One of the most straightforward and psychologically interesting images is by Tennessee painter Alison Oaks. An oil on porcelain piece titled "Bruise and Bra" shows nothing but a bit of bra strap, a bit of arm and a couple of underarm skin folds. Anatomically speaking, it's a bit of nothing in particular, yet tells an entire story, or just shy thereof. The red bra and Freudian vulva reference in underarm folds speak directly to some sort of sexual activity. The bruise on her arm is easy to take as abuse, as we've been so programmed over recent years. But is it? It isn't fresh. It almost seems bite-like in nature. And she's still wearing the red bra. Oaks has masterfully doled out just enough information to get you half way there, and leaves you hanging in limbo with more questions than answers running through your head. Best I can sort it out, it's about the nature of pleasure and pain, and how the two are often intertwined, even occupying the same space at the same time. True of most of life, just physically obvious here.

The Nexus of Styles



Jackie Hoysted: Afternoons – Where Drawing Meets Painting,
at the Fisher Art Gallery in the Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts

Jackie Hoysted's "Barely There."

Center, on the campus of Northern VA Community College (3001 N. Beauregard St., Alexandria). The event runs through August 7. The gallery is open Monday – Friday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. For more details, call 703-845-6156.

Hoysted shows 15 figure paintings on colored pastel paper, "Barely There" being the best of them. Rendered in a loose style, the artist's hand palpably present. It's a moody image of an older woman existing at the edge of the picture field.

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Lenny Campello

Kevin Mellema is such a terrific art critic... in our area we need more critical voices such as his! Kudos to the FCNP!

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Karl Kalbaugh

I applaud Kevin Mellema's attempt to impart inertia to the arts scene in the DC-area. But I would also direct Mr. Mellama's attention to the part-time and "weekend warrior" artist movement found in the Northern Virginia-area. It may not have the same caliber of glamor attached to it, but this unnoticed, underground sector of the art-world is full of joy often missing in the "big league."

This is evidenced by Vienna's "The Sundry." The Sundry has become a beacon to the part-time "weekend warrior" artist. And in my view, fosters a sense of community, that the re-booted Numark Gallery space will not be able to touch.

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Barbara Rachko

Hi Kevin, I just thought you might like to know that the figures in my pastel paintings in "Past Forward" at The Target Gallery in Alexandria are not "dolls or puppets." They are Mexican folk art figures used in Mexican religious festivals. I search for them in the markets and bazaars of central and southern Mexico. Then I bring these objects, which have a unique past in Mexican culture, and give them a second life, so to speak, in New York in the present, where they populate my paintings. Please see www.barbararachko.com for details.

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Mary Cook

Thank you Kevin for a really well written review. You are in my opinion one of the best critics in the DC area. Can't wait to see you at your closing reception at the Lee Center! Congratulations!!
Mary

[12 months ago](#)

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Deborah Mcleod

Really nice, well crafted story about Amy Lin's wonderfully eccentric, dynamic work! Thank you!

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Lenny Campello

Excellent review... Kevin Mellema continues to become one of the savviest Greater DC area art critics... good insight and good commentary...

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Lenny Campello

Concur! I hope that Morton gets to keep the space!

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