

## CURRENT REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURAL AND MANMADE

Excerpts from the Curator's Presentation – Gail M. Brown

**CURRENT REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURAL AND MANMADE**, the exhibition, introduces masterfully imagined and crafted work of thirty two highly recognized artists/craftspeople whose singular vocabularies are imbued with pointed observations and heartfelt concerns about both the fragility and the indomitable nature of the global world we inhabit- both its physical essence and the complexity of cultural practice. This opportunity as a curator to juxtapose the art- parallel skeins of earthly and human concerns, arrestingly virtuoso forms, significant imaginations and the craft of artful hands and obsessive motivations- to offer forms and objects upon which to contemplate this moment in time is both a weighty and a joyous responsibility.

These unique works, in a visual conversation, appose powerfully. They take memorable individual configurations, some already familiar, others quite unexpected and remarkable, in clay, fibers, glass, jewelry, metals, mixed media, repurposed media and wood by exceptional visual artists who had chosen craft media for its expressive potential and tactile nature, exploring process and form to articulate and develop their personally held ideas- ecological, social and political- and their own recognizable vocabularies and significantly, meaningful sequential narratives.

**The reflections/ the works and their accompanying ideas live in the same space/s as do their often overlapping commentary on the natural and cultural worlds they inhabit.**

**NATURE** as compelling subject matter has always seduced visual artists: timeless definitions of beauty, environmental cycles and systems, the temporal evolution and the recurring seasonal reemergence. And, now evermore so, the observation of its vulnerability- fragile cycles and limited abundance of these natural resources- are pointedly shared, along with references to the human condition.

Works which address the natural world and the human condition:

**Blood-Water-Pollution from Ten Modern Plagues**, updates the familiar stories of the biblical plagues as a series, e.g. access to clean water, a wall installation, in the signature palette of recycled, printed tin. By Harriete Estel Berman

**Kenley Avenue Rug** suggests the familiar, city, neighborhood landscape in footprints of individuality- a particular, artfully identified tree stump, becomes a narrative hooked rug. By Susan Brandt

**Talk To Me and Pride & Sorrow from 'Trophy Heads Now,'** addresses our collective nature/s in evocative, empathetic, sculpted animal heads from clay, salvaged furs and mixed media. By Undine Brod

**Sky, Metal & Milk** designs and builds translucent, rainbow hued, suggestively fecund sky and seascapes of luminescent cast glass remnants, as sculptural pedestal plaques. By Amber Cowan & Snic Barnes

**Lucky Strike and Study of a Decapitated White Crown Sparrow on Holiday Platter** celebrates the romantic beauty of nature and its exotic, untamed aspects, in wearable and sculptural, feral animal and insect forms of lusciously seductive enamel. By David Freda

**Giving Up the Ghost**, a sculptural form with a drawing, offers an emotional landscape on porcelain- a line drawing of personal perspective, a unique "sketchbook." By Lauren Gallaspy

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**A group of handmade ceramic vessels** identifies specific flora and fauna as a compendium- a daybook of drawings- on personal, domestic, utilitarian wares for the table. By Julia Galloway

**Flos Tenebris** takes a designed appreciation of an idealized garden vignette, a delicate fantasy, in porcelain and mixed media, a landscape segment, suggesting the larger space. By Rain Harris

**Endless**, a mysterious sculptural form, tells personal yet universal stories in cast glass and mixed media- abstracted, sculptural accounts of thought provoking emotional intimacy. By Jennifer Halvorson

**Domestication** and **21 Small Sticks Attempting to Draw the Other Glove** offer super-real artifice- detailed slices of natural and domestic life, designed and painted on plywood, suggestions of larger, familiar dramas. By Ron Isaacs

**The River** twists and ties, in unique technique, to build tactile sculpted forms- in appreciation of the perseverance of the land which provided the palette. By John McQueen

**On The Desert** and **Out of the Sea**, one of a kind jewelry which embodies a sensual narrative of the material nature of the SW landscape entwined within his personal design vocabulary. By Harold O'Connor.

**Connection** explores the interior mysteries of human and animal bodies through the unique sculptural choices and construction of assorted bone and pigment. By Judy Onofrio

**Awakening** and **Parousia** pursue the union of unforgettable natural beauty and distinctive design in complex, memory-making, mixed media jewelry. By Lin Stanionis

**Above & Below, III** builds and sculpts abstracted portraits of land masses- endangered, arresting, visually frozen, porcelain references to global warming. By Paula Winokur

**The MANMADE** and urban references to material culture and character, societal excess and dearth and social morality offer compelling universal issues as subject and reference for other chosen artists/craftspeople. Many references are in tense juxtaposition: growth and decline, energy and torpor, alternative purpose and confrontation.

*Works which address cultural and manmade issues:*

**The Eyes of George Are Upon You** creates remarkable reference to wearable forms with unexpected economic symbols, woven from US paper currency, to discuss issues of "value." By Kathy Buszkiewicz

**Encrusted** and **Afro Abe II** embellish unlikely, emblematic icons- US dollar bills- to describe potent social and historic matters of ethnic and cultural identity. By Sonya Clark

**Trump Esquire plate** and **Republican Potty** historically reference witty narratives, updated to embrace contemporary experience, painted on pointedly focused ceramic vessels. By Michelle Erickson

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**Caravan II** organizes, repurposes and designs material excess, which takes to the wall as rampantly tactile, yet unexpectedly serene, well-ordered, visual quilts. By John Garrett

**Colleen, Claire As Candidate Hilary Clinton, Dan, with US Mail Box** and the **Philadelphia Weekly Newspaper Box** are carved wood, random 'citizens' culled from life's usually anonymous community, coupled with ubiquitous objects from everyday urban society. By Susan Hagen

**Migration #14** addresses transience and relocation in an intimate series of altered, engagingly repurposed, common suitcase forms as uncommon, inspired, sculptural conception. By Ted Lott

**Brickwork Bangle** and **Brickwork Twist**, arresting 'urban brickwork' jewelry- as palette and topic- are unique badges of identity, of pride of urban place and referential civic issues. By Sharon Massey

**Sweaterman 3, Valuesman, Ribbed** and **Sweaterman 7**, hand knit, life size superheroes' personae- unexpected, engaging and surely the fictitious, invincible male uniform of choice. By Mark Newport

**Heart Teapot: Internal Combustion Metamorphosis**, the iconic ceramic vessel demonstrates political observations and ongoing concerns about historic social issues and contemporary life. By Richard Notkin

**Pineapple of Anguish** and **L'Ultima Cena** implicates historic incidents in seductive metals- discomfiting matters of power, injustice and the inhumanity of social and religious authority. By Stephen Saracino

**Pooling II** chooses bold scale and uncommon palette pairing- heavy metals with fragile cast glass- to redefine 'beguiling' jewelry inspired by her own urban surroundings. By Biba Schutz

**Red Electricity and Ancestry/Progency**, vivid, stitched, glass-beaded neckpieces offer unique, abstracted, emotional passion with exceptional figurative narratives. By Joyce Scott

**Encroaching Forest** pairs allusions to the indomitable natural landscape of the southwest with aging, man-built objects in dramatic juxtaposition: machine stitched wall pictures. By Carol Shinn

**Mining Industry: Downtown Houston**, translucent cast glass mining markers on the urban landscape, from a table sculpture series, makes visual poetry of an unexpected urban blight. By Norwood Viviano

**Stand Up Now** and **Women's Liberation, What Liberation ?**, traditional Scherenschnitt paper cuttings audaciously point at stereotypical women's roles in contemporary society. By Catherine Winkler Rayroud

**Torrent**, ingenious, collaborative jewelry- tiny, complex narratives exploring universal experience- death & mourning- to become a mm world-in-a-brooch. by Robin Kranitzky & Kim Overstreet

Richness is enhanced because much observation and narrative defies neat categories. Many artists' layered works simultaneously address both nature and nurture reflecting on the married complexity of human and environmental issues- and so too our anticipated responses.

**Upon introduction, what draws each of us, individually, to certain works, what is seductive and then memorable for an individual artist and/or the viewer.... what resonates and becomes indelible?**

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Works like all of these exhibited pose rhetorical questions- with no irony, nakedly offering beguiling, engaging visual work imbued with personal, social and globally provocative matters, cloaked in such layered heart and soul, simultaneously provoking and demanding attention visually and morally. The best of it engages the viewer *and doesn't let go*- courageously, deeply troubling and ultimately honest. Agree or not, the significant topics of conversation raised so personally merit contemplation.

**You cannot teach 'desire', passion or heart: makers' must have a healthy dose of same to employ, imbue, share. Excesses of vulnerability and generosity help too.** And a sensitized audience is the beneficiary.

The heart and 'the art and craft' of it: process and craftsmanship are authentically embedded in works- beading, blowing, building, carving, casting, constructing, crimping, designing, drawing, enameling, folding and fitting, forging and forming, glazing, granulating, hooking, knitting, molding, organizing, salvaging and saving, sculpting, sewing, slab building, snipping, twisting and tying, et al. The sequential physical means with direct results create the tactile presence and nature of the process, an intense experience for the maker and then the observant viewer. Choices of media and process celebrate appreciation for those necessary, obsessive, repetitive, recurring single steps to build an object, to create a lifetime of masterfully made forms.

All of these expressively eloquent works surely offer, invite, entice and demand our own attention to the persistent cycles of perennial life and the fragility and precarious states of the natural, cultural, manmade worlds, and the human condition. The awareness and focus of socially and environmentally responsible artists speaks to the need for shared concern and applied wisdom to our limited, precious resources- from and about the earth, from and about our species and from individual and global cultures, all of which merit conscious appreciation and timely care and nurture.