

Female Artists See Things Differently

Shaw, Kurt, Tribune-Review/Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

The juried exhibit "From a Different Point of View," which opened last month at Point Park University's Lawrence Hall in honor of the 25th anniversary of Women's History Month, features 21 varied, yet excellent, contemporary works of art from 15 female artists from across the country.

"There was never anything like this in Pittsburgh," says the exhibit's organizer John Tomayko, a Pittsburgh art collector and member of the Point Park University board of trustees, who organized the exhibit.

"We've had a good first run, so we're going to do it every two years," says Tomayko, who also provided the funding for the prizes and the purchase award.

Eric Shiner, director of the Andy Warhol Museum, was the juror for the exhibit. The participants were pulled from more than 200 entries received by members of the National Association of Women Artists. Based in New York City, the association has more than 700 members in the United States. So, it is a given that this show is a varied one. But, even so, all of the works are of the highest caliber.

Take, for example, the installation piece "Preserving Traditions," which garnered Caroline Rust of Rock Hill, S.C., a first-prize award of \$1,000.

Exploring make-up as a particular aspect of femininity, Rust's installation, which combines tubes of lipstick with larger than life paintings of women's lips, speaks volumes about the ritual of women wearing lipstick, purposely coloring their lips and employing their lips for expression. "When we are young, playing with cosmetics is one thing, but as we grow up and mature, it becomes another," Rust says.

With several close-ups of women's lips pursed, pouting and otherwise, this installation captures some of the many nuances a woman's lips can muster. "Lips, naturally, show emotion and, after adding lipstick to them, a woman's lips can appear sexy, sad, alluring, pursed and cold, innocent or friendly," Rust says.

Rust says her inspiration for the piece was drawn from childhood memories of playing with her grandmother's lipsticks. "I can still recall their waxy scent," she says.

Pennie Brantley of Petersburg, N.Y., frequently uses imagery from her travels. However, Brantley says, "I hope that viewers find the emotional and psychological spirit within the paintings to be of universal connections."

Her painting, "Stopped Train From a Moving Train (Amsterdam to Brussels in Memory of My Father)" is especially personal. That's because the source image is taken from a quick snapshot Brantley took while on a train that was slowly passing another on the tracks in Haarlem, the Netherlands, where she had traveled with her husband in 2005 to meet a woman she had only heard about.

"The trip was a step back in time to meet my father's first love from World War II in Belgium," she says. "I had been aware most of my life that Denise was very important to my dad, although he never spoke of her out of respect and love for my mother."

Years after her father's death, Brantley's mother suggested that she find Denise on a planned trip to the Benelux countries. "Thank to the Internet and newfound friends, I did," she says. "Denise was thrilled, and told me she never stopped loving him, although she is happily married to a wonderful man. They invited us to come to their home and offered to take us to the chateau where my dad lived with the other soldiers."

The bright red train in the painting is painted in a soft glow, giving the final touch to evoking a feeling of misty memories, both personal and universal.

Sculptor Judith Modrak of New York City is another artist included in the show who uses events and emotions as a springboard for exploration. For Modrak, sculpture is a way for her to transform complex scenarios of conflict and vulnerability into something tangible. "My primary medium, plaster cast, conveys both a strength and a fragility that is important to me," she says.

Modrak's piece "One Step Forward" is one of five haunting figural works from her "Standing" series that delves into the notion of in-between states, emotionally and physically. " 'One Step Forward' is about capturing the fierce determination laced with uncertainty involved in taking a step into uncharted territory," she says. "(The figure) also expresses a hint of anger at the possibility that she will not succeed."

The blue figure, which has unusual eyes that have literally stopped visitors in their tracks, is poised in a forward moving gesture, as if walking. In this way, Modrak says it invokes notions of "crossing landscape, both internal, as in changing an unsatisfactory aspect of one's life, and external, as in the courage to stand-up for one's principles in the face of opposition."

Either way, it's a real stand-out piece amongst the remaining works on display, many of which beg to be seen in person to be appreciated.

Questia, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning. www.questia.com

Publication information: Article title: Female Artists See Things Differently. Contributors: Shaw, Kurt - Author. Newspaper title: Tribune-Review/Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. Publication date: April 22, 2012. Page number: Not available. © 2009 Tribune-Review/Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. Provided by ProQuest LLC. All Rights Reserved.

This material is protected by copyright and, with the exception of fair use, may not be further copied, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means.