

Museums

In the galleries: Inspired by their homelands and beyond

By Mark Jenkins

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Tropical fruit, yesterday's newspapers and sheer color are among the inspirations for the three South America-bred artists in "Forms of the Journey" at Georgetown's All We Art. The exhibition includes work by Jesús Matheus, a Venezuelan who lives in Boston, and Colombian-born Félix Ángel and Marta Luz Gutiérrez, both longtime Washingtonians. To complete the journey, viewers must travel to Kensington, where Adah Rose Gallery also is presenting work by Ángel and Gutiérrez in "Motionless, I Stay and Go: I Am a Pause."

Though Matheus's paintings draw from fellow Latin American artists and indigenous folk crafts, observers with a Northern Hemisphere background may think of Josef Albers. Where Albers nested squares within squares, employing a narrow range of colors, Matheus abuts rectangles of varying dimensions, generally in contrasting hues. One of these canvases is in shades of medium blue, but more typical are pictures in which hot pinks nuzzle cool greens and the tropical palette is disrupted by a black block. The intent may be purely abstract, but there's a hint of Caribbean landscapes.

Matheus calls his work "architectonic," yet of these three artists, he is the only one who did not train as an architect. That background is evident in Ángel's collages, constructed from snippets of printed text. Arranged in regular patterns, the assemblages contrast the bright colors of magazines with the blacks and grays of newspapers. The tidiness, however, is ironic. Close inspection reveals that the words have been cut from accounts of war, corruption and other iniquities. Ángel's goal is not merely to correlate chaos and order, but also to question how the media trim complex events into simple stories.

Among Ángel's other works are mixed-media impressionist renderings of bicyclists, equestrians and baseball players. These pictures are featured at Adah Rose Gallery, along with one landscape in a similar style. Evocative of strength and motion, the images celebrate the physical, if not always the human. Ángel's bicyclists are brawny and dominating, perched on undersized two-wheelers, yet his horsemen are upstaged by their steeds, which seem built for power rather than for speed.

Gutiérrez is showing paintings and related sculptures at All We Art. The canvases are populated with eccentric, black-outlined entities that combine qualities of mammals, insects and amoebas. They're rendered in a manner that suggests cave paintings, Philip Guston and underground comics. Removed from the teeming compositions and recast as individual fabric sculptures, the creatures appear part Giacometti, part Pixar.

The Gutiérrez artworks at Adah Rose are stylistically similar, but their principal subject is fruit, with just a few uncanny animals. Earth tones and produce-stand hues dominate, and the simple paintings are

distinguished by inventive touches. The artist carved seed shapes into the thick pigment atop one canvas, and she pulled red threads from the backing fabric through another picture to simulate protruding spines. Perhaps all these fruits are available in Colombian street markets, but Gutiérrez gives a strong sense of having invented her own little universe.

Forms of the Journey On view through May 17 at All We Art, 1666 33rd St. NW. 202-375-9713.

www.allweartstudio.com. ***Motionless, I Stay and Go: I Am a Pause*** On view through May 24 at Adah Rose Gallery, 3766 Howard Ave., Kensington. 301-922-0162. www.adahrosegallery.com.

Davis Morton

Retired homicide detective Davis Morton used to work for Montgomery County, but he is not a Bethesda kind of guy. The recognizable exteriors in his show at Zenith Salon, “. . . From Every Walk of Life,” are mostly of Baltimore’s Fells Point, a neighborhood where Edward Hopper might feel comfortable today. The realist painter likes such film noir subjects as bars, racetracks, wet streets and near-nude beauties appraising themselves in the mirror. Yet he also paints still lifes and landscapes, including one of a dry African expanse far from the Inner Harbor.

Although Morton often works from photographs, he forgoes the hard edges and gleaming surfaces of photorealism. Working in oil, the artist layers subdued colors to soften outlines and create a warm glow that evokes what he calls “a living moment.” These are quiet paintings, with a dark palette and a late-night vibe. The resemblance to Hopper is unmistakable, and Morton acknowledges it. But he also mentions Vermeer, and there is a hint of Rembrandt in the shadowy studies of black-clad people. Morton’s Maryland isn’t just retro; it’s Old World.

. . . From Every Walk of Life: The Works of Davis Morton On view through May 16 at Zenith Salon, 1429 Iris St. NW. 202-783-2963. www.zenithgallery.com.

Dane Winkler

Because he grew up on a farm, Dane Winkler does not see agriculture as pastoral. There is an industrial aspect to “Chassis,” his show at Hamiltonian Gallery, which consists principally of two large sculptures and two 12-minute video loops. A University of Maryland MFA student from Upstate New York, Winkler puts real-world building skills in the service of what he calls “mystery.”

One sculpture, titled “A-L-I-C-E” after a favorite cow the young Winkler saw being butchered, consists of two large hanging bales of raw wool that rotate periodically on a motorized steel scaffold. The other, “Setting Sail: Gettin Outta Dodge,” is a wooden pontoon boat accompanied by audio of nature sounds. The craft looks a little ungainly, but it is river worthy, as one of the videos demonstrates. (The other documents the construction.) Though potentially practical, the boat is becalmed in the gallery. If the vessel’s location alone doesn’t make it appear outlandish, its built-in cup holder tips the balance toward absurdity.

Dane Winkler: Chassis On view through May 9 at Hamiltonian Gallery, 1353 U St. NW, Suite 101. 202-332-1116. www.hamiltoniangallery.com.

Alchemical Vessels

When is a bowl not a bowl? When Foon Sham shrouds it in cedar slats, Pat Goslee wraps it in pastel elastic bands or Jenny Wu, emulating Ai Wei Wei, lets it crash to the floor. Those are but three of 125 strategies for transforming the “Alchemical Vessels” in Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery’s annual benefit show. Each piece begins with a shallow white bowl, to be transformed as the artist wishes. The literal vessel can even be excluded from the final work, although that rarely happens.

Unsurprisingly, many participants simply brought the bowl into the realm of their established styles. Others used the dish as a rounded box in which to construct a diorama: Bridget Sue Lambert added dollhouse furniture to construct a sort of bed-and-breakfast and P.D. Klein inserted branches to suggest a 3-D Asian ink painting. Jeneen Piccuiro and Patterson Clark turned their bowls into little kilns, caked with ash and soot, while Pattie Porter Firestone pierced the blank white curve with brightly painted aluminum ribbons. When there are 124 other bowls on display, making the vessel the least important part of the assemblage is a winning strategy.

Alchemical Vessels On view through May 22 at Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery, 1632 U St. NW. 202-483-8600. www.smithcenter.org/arts-healing/joan-hisaoka-art-gallery.html.

Jenkins is a freelance writer.

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