

IN THE GALLERIES

Using clay as a metaphor for the body and the landscape

BY MARK JENKINS

Among the goals of Ara Koh's show at Hamiltonian Artists is to reimagine landscape painting as something literally derived from the land. Other objects in the Seoul-born local artist's "Grounding; Grounded; Ground" equate clay with flesh. According to the unorthodox ceramicist's statement, she is "trying to understand earth, humanness." To do that, she uses materials excavated and shaped with her own hands.

Several pieces were made by slathering various kinds of clay — including kaolin, a soft white substance used for porcelain — on canvases or wooden panels. These painting-like objects are defined by crags, fractures and subtle color shifts. One appears to be merely a large hanging sheet, draped and creased. Only close inspection reveals that its surface is covered with patterns made by dried, cracked kaolin.

A few of Koh's creations recall traditional building materials such as terra-cotta tiles, while others derive from natural forms. Nests of stoneware curls in tan, white or greenish blue evoke vines and tendrils (and recall the work of another masterly local ceramicist, Laurel Lukaszewski). Two pieces array concentric ovals or circles made of stoneware that looks as thin and fragile as skin. Inside one is a mix of glass and resin that simulates water, which is as essential to pottery as clay. The glistening green depths suggest another thing that's full of water: the human body.

Ara Koh: Grounding; Grounded; Ground
Through Dec. 2 at Hamiltonian Artists, 1353 U St. NW. hamiltonianartists.org, 202-332-1116.



AMY KASLOW GALLERY

Staking Claim

Amy Kaslow Gallery often exhibits Indigenous crafts, but its current show takes a more complicated approach to traditional goods-making. Most of the 13 contributors to "Staking Claim: Native American Artists on Identity & Place" meld elements of their threatened cultures with Euro-American techniques. The show overlaps with the National Gallery of Art's "The Land Carries Our Ancestors," sharing Muscogee-Creek painter George Alexander (also known as Ofuskie). He uses an expressionist style to paint a bare-chested man on horseback who

George Alexander's work "Multidimensional" is included in the exhibit "Staking Claim: Native American Artists on Identity and Place." Most of the 13 artists combine elements of their threatened cultures with contemporary touches.

appears timeless save for one detail: He wears an astronaut's helmet. Seminole artist Tony Tiger employs traditional elements but combines them in a contemporary manner, layering colorful textile designs over old photographs of Native people. Another collagist, Montana Blackfoot artist Terrance Guardipee, assembles maps, photos, ID cards and vintage financial documents, placing them on wooden triangles or skateboard decks — a form of transportation somewhere between the horse and the spaceship. Hopi artist Larsen Harris Jr. uses traditional knife

whittling to make kachina dolls, representations of spirit beings he embellishes with feathers and plant fibers. Such potters as Jerome Ebelacker and Sharon Naranjo Garcia (both heirs to Santa Clara Pueblo's ceramics practice) and Cavan Gonzales (whose Tewa name is Tse-Whang) produce vessels with elegant curves and iridescent dark finishes. Ira Lujan (Taos/Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo) uses an old-world art — glass-blowing — to produce solid-glass antlers that he pairs with gnarled found wood. Simultaneously rustic and sophisticated, these sculptural collages are

traditional in spirit if not method. **Staking Claim: Native American Artists on Identity & Place** Through Dec. 3 at Amy Kaslow Gallery, 7920 Norfolk Ave., Bethesda. amykaslowgallery.com.

Elaine Florimonte

Literally as well as figuratively layered, Elaine Florimonte's abstracted landscapes are built like the Earth itself: bit by bit, but with epic results. The pictures in her Touchstone Gallery show, "Lost and Found,"

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"Take Me to the Water I" by Elaine Florimonte, an acrylic collage included in her show "Lost and Found."

TOUCHSTONE GALLERY

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