

Reflections on artwork from "Earth Matters" Sanchez Art Center

by Julie Stock

January/February 2018

Seeing Jennifer Alpaugh's cloud painting upon entering the Sanchez Center East Wing gallery is a refreshing vista, free of pollution (or is it?) Clean air, beautifully painted is an "ahh" moment that we all need to be reminded of as an essential part of our lives. We need the sky, the air, the atmosphere, free of drones, clean oxygen, and to look up from our phones to watch the clouds.

Across the gallery, Orcas Island by Ann West feels connected to the Alpaugh piece, now with a peaceful as well as a foreboding feeling. At first Orcas Island looks quiet, gentle; however the left side is darker, while the right is brighter. It is the changing weather, the light and dark, the power and peace of storms and sunny days.

"Cypress" by Charlotte Seekamp is a precious treasure, a classically framed sepia photo, like a memory from a keepsake box of an intimate connection. Or, a post-apocalyptic artifact of what was once alive in its natural balanced habitat.

Rig Terrell's piece "Fading Memory" is labeled as a photograph, however it looks like a layered collage/mixed-media piece, scraped and spray painted. There is a presence of light, and several blues. It is mysterious and wonderful; Earth Matters; there is a sacred yin-yang cylindrical form, open and fragile, in the center breathes life and energy, arctic cool and at the same time, the end of days, a sense of the end of the cycle, a fragile balance, soon to dissipate.

"Knot the Answer" by Riita Herwitz brings up the questions How? Why? What? Can the dense tangles of entrenched messes, thick layers of war, destruction of the earth, its innocent inhabitants ever be undone, straightened out, brought to order? Riita's piece says "No." A human size column of complicated, heavy, colorless, unapproachable, twisted ropey mess, imposing and powerful, stands in our space, reminding us of the power of decisions, time, the dramatic downside of the interconnectedness of the whole.

A conceptual piece by Cynthia Rettig, two oil cans, one black and one white, both vessels for the same material create an opportunity to make connections about resources, energy, race, equal and opposites. There is no gray area here.

Alan Firestone's desperate attempt at a help signal is humorous and fatalistic. A set of eyes is about to be swallowed up by quicksand. A free postcard to take to remind us of the impending end of the world as we know it.

"Space Junque" by Charles McDevitt is literally that which the title describes. It's there too, not just here.

"Haloorchaea" by Lisa Kairo is a sophisticated, delightful encaustic that draws the viewer into the elements of energy, science, molecules, existence. Repetition of white particles dart across

the skin-like background; soft textures of the wax media and the energetic use of repetition and rhythm make this piece a stand-out.

At the end of the gallery is a fiber arts map of the Smith River: "Wild and Free". This river is the last undammed river in California. This is a layered and beautifully textured labor of love by Kimberlie Moutoux. A map in fabric! The river has three paths to the ocean and reminds of the the rich landscape, the blue-green paradise here on earth. One can get lost in the piece, imagining the beauty and adventure of this place. Fly above, float in the heavens, look into a pure vista. Saturated colors, layers of cloth and stitching; translate the flora and waters below.

Sheila Gamble Dorn's kelp basket, tightly woven, lovingly labored from giant bull kelp, sits humbly and forever formed into a utilitarian object. It harkens back to native experiences of the land, specifically the coast, where we are, reminding us to connect with the beauty of our resources, notice the natural color, whimsical and cylindrical quality, once so flexible, now dried to sculpture form. It pretends to be nothing else, no imposter, a pure and direct gift of nature elevated to a pedestal and brought to our attention. No plastic. No part of this artwork was processed in any artificial way; the material for this sculpture was transported by the ocean, not a shipping container or a manufacturing plant. This is the material, the matter, of Earth.

"Earth Matters" is an intriguing and beautiful exhibit concerning that topic which desperately requires our attention. It can be overwhelming. While walking this gallery, one can contemplate our collective concerns. Art can speak, remind us of that which is front and center in our world. The conversation is important. The decisions and attention brought forward from this exhibit can effect some change, small or large...Earth Matters.

Julie Stock