

'Thank You CT' Exhibit Curated By Its Artists

By **Susan Dunne**



Hollis Dunlap

Every August, the Fernando Luis Alvarez Gallery in Stamford presents a "Thank You CT" exhibit to showcase work by Connecticut artists. This year, gallerist Alvarez has decided to step back from curating the show himself. "It eliminates my bias," he said. "I'm just watching the dialogue that others have offered."

The others he refers to are several artists represented by his gallery, who chose work by state artists they admire. Rex Prescott Walden of Branford, Joe Boginski of Stamford, Shelby Head of Madison, Sacred Heart University Professor Nathan Lewis and a lone New Yorker, James Gortner, each chose his or her artists for a variety of reasons.

(Alvarez chose one artist in the exhibit, photographer George Phelps.)

Walden chose Molly S. McDonald of Guilford and Scott Paterson of Branford. Both create abstracted scenes from reality. McDonald's scenes are wildly colorful and inspired by landscapes, while Paterson draws on a variety of inspirations and a more muted palette.

"All of us worked together with a group called the Friday Night Painters. We've kept in touch," Walden said. "Molly is landscape-based and goes into an abstract place from there. Scott does figurative pieces. He calls them 'arrangements.' He sets things up and attacks them from there."

Lewis chose University of Hartford instructor Jaclyn Conley, who works in abstracted figurative imagery; New London painter Hollis Dunlap, whose moody works are more straight figurative; Bridgeport painter-filmmaker Roland Becerra, whose landscapes have an ominous, spooky quality; and Norwalk Community College instructor Steven DiGiovanni, whose works tell ambiguous stories.

Lewis says of Conley, "I'm "impressed with her sense of design, her color and the way she applies paint. There's a freshness to it. She's somewhat gestural in her marks. She tries to achieve the painting in as few strokes as possible. When she makes her marks, she really makes them count."

He called Dunlap's graphic sensibility "volumetric and illusionistic." Becerra, he said, "has a visionary sense of composition" that reflects his background in filmmaking. DiGiovanni, he said, "has such inventiveness in his narratives. You always see things going on that spur you to interpret them."

Joe Boginski chose fellow Stamford artist Charles McIlvane, who contributed a small- scale, asymmetrical, wooden abstract sculpture. "His sculptures have an interesting balance between organic and inorganic," Boginski said. "They have an effective contrast between crystalline and human, almost dancer-like, structures, which is something I don't see a lot in a wood medium."

James Gortner, who does not work in Connecticut but in Harlem, chose **Camille Eskell of Norwalk, who creates culturally evocative works using fezzes**; and UConn instructor Sharon Butler, whose oils on canvas are abstract and geometric.

"Eskell made these mixed-media, wearable artworks, which seemed very performative in some way, and I could tell just by looking they were autobiographical," Gortner said. "Sharon ... had these paintings [with activating titles] that stood out right away."

Gortner, the newest artist represented by the gallery, is in this exhibit, too, showing three fascinating portraits of women created by painting over cut-up pieces of other paintings.

Head chose Connie Pfeiffer of East Haddam and Jonathan Waters of New Haven. Pfeiffer's works are unique sculptures

created from steel wire, which hang with deceptive delicacy from the ceiling. Waters' work, by comparison, seems to plop itself down into the gallery. He created a massive, dark, wall sculptures out of wood, paint and masking tape, and smaller prints of geometrical abstractions.

Waters, Head said, "often surprises me with his material," and Pfeiffer's work draws her in because "it appears to be very fragile, yet she uses steel and metal, which is not a fragile material."

They both have something in common, Head said: "They blur the line between two- and three-dimensional art successfully. They both use shadow. The sculpture itself is one object, and the wall and the floor are the second."

Head's choices go right to the heart of what it means to be an artist-curator. "They seem to ask and answer similar questions in their work that I've been asking," she said.

"THANK YOU CT" *will be at Fernando Luis Alvarez Gallery, 96 Bedford St. in Stamford, until Sept. 5. flalvarezgallery.com.*