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“DESIRE” AND “FRESH FACES” REBECCA IBEL GALLERY THROUGH DECEMBER 20

Gallery owner Rebecca Ibel’s mission has always been fairly forthright: to feature thought-provoking works by emerging and established contemporary artists. Now in her gallery’s 10th year, she continues in her quest of bringing potentially overlooked local and national artists to the area with her two current exhibitions, *Fresh Faces* and *Desire*.

Although *Fresh Faces* highlights the diverse work of artists who are new to the gallery, the eclectic group seems handpicked for their subtly unifying themes of disassociation and familiarity. Hailing from Long Beach to New York City and points in between, Laura Bidwa, Daina Higgins, Rory Krupp and Daniel Mirer simultaneously invoke feelings of both distance and connection with our man-made and natural environments.

There’s a definite dialogue in styles and content between the four artists. While Bidwa’s small, neutral-colored acrylic paintings and Krupp’s colorfully spare watercolors seem to draw the viewer into the dazzling minutiae of nature through a leafless tree or a veiny flower petal, the quiet loneliness of Mirer’s abandoned buildings and Higgins’ grainy-textured cityscapes makes an indelible statement about urbanity and alienation.

Higgins’ work in particular manages to capture the unusual beauty found in streets littered with melting ice, overturned trashcans and neglected buildings. Recalling walks along railroad tracks on Columbus’ West Side as a seven-year participant in CCAD’s Saturday morning art classes and later as a student at Fort Hayes, Higgins’ memories of the graffiti-adled area are apparent. Using spray paint to create haunting still-lives approaching a cross between photography, painting and graf writing, the small-scale monotone prints are as entrancing as any Seurat.

Around the corner, in Ibel’s main gallery space, is Barclay Hughes’ Las Vegas-inspired series *Desire*. Taking pains not to highlight obvious Sin City tropes, Hughes instead balances the unexpected (a pristine white Cadillac in an underground garage) with the surprising (a pastel-drenched stuccoed wall). Only in a print showcasing a Nevada neon sign with a missing letter would you know you were in a city known more for its decadence and debauchery.

For info call 291-2555.

—NIKKI DAVIS