



At the Tree Line

Works by Ingrid Ludt and Iain Machell

On exhibit: 'At the Tree Line' at HVCC - Times Union

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"At the Tree Line" explores nature of art-making about nature

By Amy Griffin

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There's a quote commonly attributed to Albert Einstein: "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better." This might be an apt description of the studio practice of artists Iain Machell and Ingrid Ludt. The exhibit "At the Tree Line" at The Teaching Gallery at Hudson Valley Community College showcases the work of these two artists who share a sensibility in their treatment of nature. For Ludt and Machell, focusing on the landscape means dissecting it, breaking it down into manageable bits as if to come to some understanding of it.

Although their work is different, they play off each other nicely. Each artist is a sculptor who starts with drawing. Neither could be described as a landscape artist in the traditional sense, but their individual takes on natural forms, however minimalist, have a similar meditative quality.

Ludt of Clifton Park takes over the upper gallery. On three walls, 25 framed drawings are arranged salon style, mapped out in a pattern that rejects the grid. Some are isolated, some grouped closer together. With minimal lines, a wealth of white space and a limited palette, Ludt's drawings are abstract but rooted in nature. They appear variously like contours on a map or as isolated studies of the negative space in a landscape. Some look like borders of an unknown country, others like geographic elements taken out of context.

In her artist statement, Ludt says the drawing part of her process is long — working on multiple drawings at once. These "cross-pollinate each other and form relationship clusters," she writes. Deciphering these relationships is part of the fun of looking at this work.

On the fourth wall is an installation of handmade rocks, climbing the gallery wall in a configuration that echoes the hanging of the framed drawings. Bunched together with a few outliers, these stones are almost all cast from the same mold, but their placement diverts attention from this repetition. The three-dimensional objects are an intuitive extension of her two-dimensional work; she literally solidifies these ideas in her sculptures.

For Machell, who is chairman of the Art, Design, Music, Theatre and Communication Department at SUNY Ulster, it seems it's the textures and surfaces found in nature that engage him. He works with photo, video, sculpture and drawing, and sometimes combines several in a single piece. He, too, works with a limited palette — with red unifying the work, particularly the presence of a bold red line. This line intersects his drawings in different ways, but always disrupting nature. In "Terra Interruptus 1," the line negates (or interrupts, as the title suggests) the landscape, while in other pieces it acts as a borderline — bisecting a mountaintop in his sculptural floor piece, "Terra Interruptus 103."

Whether in groups of small, mixed-media drawings or in a series of painterly black and white photos, Machell pushes the meaning of the landscape. Even in a group of drawings focused on the horizon line, Machell brings an intimacy to the scenes with an emphasis on texture. In his photos, nature remains identifiable, even as his use of blur creates sweeping brush strokes and bold contrast.

With distinctive results, Machell and Ludt each distill the information gleaned from the landscape and make it their own, personal statement. By pairing them, gallery director Tara Fracalossi has initiated an intriguing conversation between the two.

Amy Griffin is a freelance writer in Delmar.

If you go

"At the Tree Line"

When: Through Oct. 12; hours: Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Wednesday 1 to 7 p.m., Saturday noon to 4 p.m.; closed Sunday and Monday

Where: The Teaching Gallery at Hudson Valley Community College, Administration Building, 80 Vandenburg Ave., Troy

Admission: Free

Info: 629-8006; <http://www.hvcc.edu/teachinggallery>