

## arts

# The right complement

Two artists' works fit UAlbany's space and with each other

By Tim Kane

Staging an exhibition at the University Art Museum at the University at Albany is a challenge. With expansive concrete walls rising high above a voluminous space split into two levels, the place can devour art. For years, it has been interesting to watch how deftly curators have handled the situation.

While they have done well, the current exhibit may set the standard. Rachel Foullon's installations are near-perfect symbioses between artist and the space — the most intriguing I've seen there. The New Yorker's site-specific "hangings," collectively dubbed "The Braided Sun," meld into the barn-like environs without losing their independence, while breathing life into the institutional feel of the museum.

At times, her multimedia concoctions — made of wood, metal, fabric and tools, among other things — grab and climb the walls, almost hugging them with affection. Enamored with old farm sites such as 17th-century Dutch homesteads along the Hudson River, Foullon is quite at home in such a utilitarian place.

Paired with photographer Dana Hoey in own her solo exhibit, *The Phantom Sex*, on the lower level, Foullon's abstractions contrast sharply with Hoey's portraits of women in various stages of life and undress. Yet they do reach some agreement. Foullon's art is about the living-off-the-land fringe that questions gender roles and divisions of labor; Hoey examines gender identity through the prism of psychology and popular culture.

Their differences raise the two solo exhibitions to a higher level. Despite their approaches, both complement each other within the space at a design

## On exhibit

"RACHEL FOULLON:  
BRAIDED SUN"

"DANA HOEY:  
THE PHANTOM SEX"

■ **When:** Through Dec. 8; hours: Tuesday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, noon to 4 p.m.

■ **Where:** University Art Museum, University at Albany, 1400 Washington Ave, Albany

■ **Admission:** Free

■ **Info:** 442-4035; <http://www.albany.edu/museum>

level. Foullon's three-dimensional assemblages upstairs provide a canopy for Hoey's photographs below, nurturing her work's subtle cynicism, while Hoey augments Foullon's billowing forms with a harder edge.

With more than 20 photographs and collages, Hoey's exhibition is a 10-year update on her 20-year career, examining what it's like to be female, with an outlook often compared to Cindy Sherman. For Foullon, "Braided Sun" is a 10-year anthology about her finding expression from farming and its structures.

Employing all sorts of materials associated with working the land —



"BODIES IN SPACE" by Dana Hoey.

hardware, rope, denim, an antique bucksaw and washboard, to mention a few — Foullon's objects are small vignettes in the life of a farmer amid isolation and struggle. Often extending up the gallery's walls, they absorb the gallery's rigid architectural structure with natural and malleable materials, providing character and liveliness.

Work gloves bolstered by cedar pegs against molding and intertwined with a garden hose signify a day's tasks completed or to be done — the never-ending drudgery of tilling the land. A dyed vintage coverall, socks, rope and

other implements suggest the merging of the human and the man-made into a single existence.

In "Cluster (This façade the evil character of the farm would isolate and happiness would bring)" (2009), a canvas net engulfs a shirt, portraying farming as a form of spiritual subsistence. It's hard not to notice her allusions to the Christian cross and the crucifixion in many of her arrangements.

What really makes Foullon's installations so intriguing is their coy references to domesticity and femininity. Constructed of inland red cedar, dye,

stain, sea salt and hardware, a mere canvas cover is transformed into a large purse in "Commensurate with Modern Progress." Or with its ends upturned slightly, it resembles a frilly skirt. Another object uses canvas as something akin to a floral arrangement, a particularly feminine occupation.

As a whole, her works ask: What's women's work anyway? On the farm, Foullon argues through her objects, there is little distinction between home, work and specific roles.

While Foullon derives her vocabulary from structure and material, Hoey finds hers in group dynamics.

Frames like "Rebirthing" (2010), "Survivors" (1997), "Bikini Brawl" (1995) and "Commander" (2000) survey a range of experiences women have when they are amongst themselves. At first glance, her portraits seem innocuous, but they're packed with underlying tensions and acerbic tones.

"Bikini Brawl" has two young girls in a tiff on a beach, a reminder of how nasty adolescent women can be to each other, especially with boys in the picture. "Commander" quaintly discusses power and leadership in the female domain with acuity while "Rebirthing" alludes to women working together to override society's expectations.

One of the few pictures with smiling faces, "Survivors" has just two women enjoying a conversation suggesting

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COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LTD LOS ANGELES  
"COMMENSURATE WITH MODERN PROGRESS," by Rachel Foullon.

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larger group relationships are detrimental to the individuality of the female. “Profane Waste,” (2001) a close up of a woman burning a \$100 bill with a contorted look of anger, comes the closest to Foullon’s off-the-grid statements about society, home life and being female.

A series of collages by Hoey, made in the mid-2000s, called “Pattern Recognition,” are similar to geometric scrapbooks memorializing older women and their life experiences with dazzling compositions. The portraits are juxtaposed against commonplace images found in magazines. They ardently discuss the possibility that finding happiness comes from within, not externally.

Hoey’s most recent works contemplate remembrance, posterity and legacy. Using digital inkjet print technology, Hoey photographs her death mask

and casts of other women’s faces, creating eerie, disconcerting and provocative portraits as if found in a catacomb. “Me Dead” (2012), a self-portrait, is a look at the future through a current relic, piquing existential thoughts.

For Hoey, the recent mask series marks a significant departure, bringing a sculptural element to her work. Combined with the collages and the photographs, there’s a more encompassing examination of her creativity, showing versatility and experimentation.

And they also connect with Foullon’s three-dimensional forms in a more direct way, tying the two artists more securely together.

Although billed as two solo exhibitions, “Braided Sun” and “The Phantom Sex” together deliver fully enunciated commentaries about life, work and being a woman.

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► *Tim Kane is a freelance writer in Albany.*