

In the galleries: 'Strictly Painting' is anything but



Eric Garner, "Pyramid," on view at McLean Project for the Arts. (Courtesy Eric Garner and McLean Project for the Arts)

By Mark Jenkins July 18

The McLean Project for the Arts' biennial "Strictly Painting" survey is 20 years old, so the title's modifier is probably here to stay. No matter that this year's assortment, includes semi-sculptural pieces that bend the picture plane, protrude from the wall and even dangle from the rafters. Or that one of the participants is actually a photographer.

The show features 55 works by 38 regional artists, chosen by Phillips Collection curator Vesela Sretenovic. Among the least traditional in form or technique are Richard Paul Weibinger's neon-hue, photographic close-ups of flowers; Jackie Hoysted's colorful constructions of silver metal and painted wooden circles; and Sanzi Kermes's mobiles of painted-paper lozenges in various sizes.

The realistic paintings tend toward camera-emulating precision. In Lillianne Milgrom's diptych, "Le Rouge and Le Noir," two exactly rendered young women, redhead and brunette, stare away from each other. Dorothy Bonica's "Castaway Child" is an exceptionally large and detailed view of grass, dirt, leaves and a crumpled piece of paper; it shows a place where something may have happened, now abandoned. Just as uninhabited and much more streamlined is Lillian Hoover's "Awning," in which architectural detail serves an exercise in composition.

Georgia Nassikas's muted, subtly graduated pictures resemble landscapes but approach Rothko-like abstraction and serenity. Two examples of Bill Hill's "Bonden Crossings" series, painted with diluted oils in shades of purple, have horizontal gestures that seem to flow left to right. There's even more sense of motion in Greg Braun's diamond-shape "Purple Pansy Petal," whose magenta surface allows glimpses of blue and yellow undercoats. The corners flex as if the piece is ready to curl off the wall, escaping literal notions of what painting can be.

Strictly Painting 10 On view through Aug. 1 at McLean Project for the Arts, 1234 Ingleside Ave., McLean. 703-790-1953. www.mpaart.org.



Ana Sediles, "Watercolor 8," on view at All We Art. (Courtesy Ana Sediles and All We Art)

Ana Sediles

Simplicity is paramount when painting in watercolor, which is Ana Sediles's principal medium. The Spanish artist, whose first American show is now at All We Art, executes land-and-seascapes that rely on fluid textures, simulating the play of light and a strong contrast between vertical and horizontal. Interestingly, and effectively, Sediles usually forgoes the customary landscape format. Rather than maximizing the horizon line, she grabs a vertical slice of a long vista.

Sediles also is showing some abstract intaglio prints, bold and monochromatic, and two sketchy acrylics that follow the traditional wide-angle approach. It's her watercolors, however, that dominate. Working primarily in blue, brown-gray and the white of the underlying paper, the artist evokes the Mediterranean shore or bucolic streams. Two paintings show Central Park bordered by skyscrapers, but Sediles's pictures are rarely so urban or so specific. Drawing on memory or imagination rather than photographs, she paints moments in which what matters is not location but the universal interplay of sunlight and rippling currents.

Ana Sediles On view through July 26 at All We Art, 1666 33rd St. NW. 202-375-9713. www.allweartstudio.com.

Kurt Godwin and Betsy Packard

There is no unifying motif in "Outliers: Kurt Godwin and Betsy Packard," but that's intentional. Curator J.W. Mahoney calls the American University Museum show "a sampler — not a retrospective." (Yet it does sort of function as the latter for Godwin, who died last year.) Both local artists focus on the everyday, which in Godwin's case means mostly nature, and in Packard's, frequently the domestic realm, though it's sometimes eerily transformed.

To judge from this selection, Godwin often headed into the forest but rarely took the same style with him. "Through the Trees" breaks the view into near-abstract patterns, while "Dump in the Woods" is more realistic in its depiction of sky, foliage and detritus. His painting "Inventory of Everything" resembles a patchwork quilt, and thus it ventures close to Packard's method. She can paint, but frequently uses fabric and found objects. She wraps commonplace things, arranges cloth into geometric collages and, for "Solemn Vow," disassembles a black suit, so it hangs on the wall like a ghostly presence. The remnant suggests both the human figure in general and the specific existence of the person who wore it.



Joseph Crawford Pile, "Greenmount Ave Lucid Dream (Max Power...PUNCH IT!!!)," Detail, Acrylic, Mixed Media, and Collage on Panel; on view at Hillyer Art Space. (Courtesy Joseph Crawford Pile and Hillyer Art Space)

Outliers: Kurt Godwin and Betsy Packard On view through July 26 at the American University Museum, Katzen Arts Center, 4400 Massachusetts Ave. NW. 202-885-1300. www.american.edu/museum.

Joseph Crawford Pile

Growing up on a farm in Kentucky, Joseph Crawford Pile came to love the harsh music of pickups, dirt bikes and, swishing to a nearby Army base, military choppers. The artist started making crayon drawings of such

devices as a small child, and some of those pictures are in his Hillyer Art Space show "Vehicle Misbehaving." These days, Pile's mixed-media works are more sophisticated in technique, and more absurdist in outlook. They also have a new element: Their backdrops are often the streets of Baltimore, his current home.

Many of the recent pieces are small and on paper, as the earliest ones were, though they include abstract patterns that probably wouldn't occur to a young boy. Rendered in a mix of free and precise gestures, the larger pictures imagine epic battles in which motorcycles, helicopters and jacked-up 4-x-4 trucks contend on recognizable thoroughfares. (Pile labels one particularly baroque scenario a "lucid dream.") Viewers who don't share the artist's taste for demolition-derby action can still appreciate the streetscapes.

Joseph Crawford Pile: Vehicles Misbehaving On view through Aug. 1 at Hillyer Art Space, 9 Hillyer Ct. NW. 202-338-0325. www.hillyerartspace.org.

John Stango

In the world that Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Roy Lichtenstein wrought, is it still possible to be a pop artist? Some may doubt it, but not John Stango. The Philadelphian's paintings, 12 of which are now on display at Artist's Proof, are derivative but hardly tentative. Stango brashly appropriates his predecessors' techniques and emphasizes bold, mostly primary, colors.

Stango depicts such mid-'60s idols as John F. Kennedy, Muhammad Ali and Marilyn Monroe — as well as superheroes and commercial insignias — with a mixture of reverence and giddiness. Where Warhol did Brillo boxes and Campbell's soup cans, his successor goes for Cadillac, Chanel and Absolut — and Campbell's soup cans. The artist is a distant cousin of Norman Rockwell, but he's better at pop-cult images than everyday scenes. The least convincing picture here is a celeb- and logo-free view of D.C. monuments.

John Stango On view through July 31 at Artist's Proof, 1533 Wisconsin Ave. NW. 202-803-2782. www.aproof.net.

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