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GALLERIES

Offerings to the sky and luminous flowers from the trash

By Cate McQuaid

It's just a coincidence that Jane D. Marsching's sweetly elegiac exhibit should be the last at Allston Skirt Gallery, but it's a fitting send-off. The conceptual artist focuses on the environment, which the threat of global warming has made a flash point for sentiment and stewardship.

Marsching, an ICA Prize finalist in 2006, spent recent months as an artist in residence at the Blue Hill Observatory, a weather station in Milton. There, she worked with program director Don McCasland to craft a large, boxy blue kite, modeled on one designed by the Wright brothers.

The kite, scuffed from use, dominates the gallery. Marsching outfitted it with sound equipment; it can both receive and transmit. One lyrical video, "Story for the Sky," depicts a performance in which she read a chapter of Jules Verne's "Journey to the Center of the Earth" aloud and broadcast from the hovering kite, as an offering to the sky. The wind roared back.

The video startles with its beauty, as the lone kite moves through the sky, dodging the observatory's weather-vane stoked roof and bowing over pine trees just as Marsching reads "as tall as pines" from Verne's text. Weather permitting, the kite will fly again tomorrow night in a performance with poetry at the Blue Hill Observatory (see allstonskirt.com for information; while reservations are needed for shuttle-bus service, hikers are also welcome).

Another video offers a taste of Samuel Beckett: A lone juggler walks around in the snow outside the observatory in his shirtsleeves trying to keep all his balls in the air.

The artist has fashioned weather flags, which in the early 20th century hung outside US post offices with the day's forecast. Marsching has cut text from Woody Guthrie's song "Black Wind Blowing" into these simple banners.

"Weather's gonna break and hell's gonna fly, baby, sweet thing, darling," reads the text on the black and white flag predicting a sudden fall in temperature. Guthrie chronicled the Depression-era drought that created the region known as the Dust Bowl, and with his lyrics Marsching aptly ties together economic and environmental woes.

Deb Todd Wheeler has an exquisite show at Allston Skirt featuring her color photographs of flowers crafted from plastic bags, made by visitors to an exhibition Wheeler mounted last year. Scruffy and luminous, these buds make beauty out of trash. Both Wheeler and Marsching delve into heavy themes but frame them, dancing on the wind or as glowing florals, with light hearts.

Nuanced canvases

Jack Tworokov, an early member of the New York School in the 1940s and '50s, may be best known for his aggressive Abstract Expressionist paintings, but the canvases he made late in life, in the 1960s and '70s, introduce the keen refinement of geometry without losing the power of the brush stroke.

A show of his late work at ACME Fine Art is accompanied by a tiny exhibit that includes a couple of earlier Tworokovs, such as "Figure CD" (1960), a garish orange woman slashed onto a blue ground with bold strokes. In a magazine interview, the artist later called that style of painting "nihilistic."

In the later paintings, the brushwork became more nuanced; great swaths of textured color hung on crisp frameworks of intersecting lines. The straight lines suggest looking through a fractured prism, but with Tworokov's delicate strokes, it's as if he has wrapped the hard-edged prism in translucent velvet.

"Indian Red Series #1" sports glinting, silver-gray lines, filled in with red, brown, gray, and blue, each dusted with another tone. The layering of colors imbues the painting with breath. It's geometric but organic and unpredictable. Tworokov handled his material masterfully. Pulling in from the broad strokes of Abstract Expressionism, he liberated something quieter and more intriguing.



Darren Foote, *Dining Table*, poplar, 2008

Wood works, wild colors

Rhys Gallery owner Colin Rhys plans a move to Los Angeles next March. He says he has not decided how long he will keep open his Harrison Avenue space. His scheduled programming ends with the next show, featuring photos by Judith Larsen, May 8-June 19.

In the meantime, the Darren Foote exhibit at Rhys is clever and beautifully crafted. Foote has one conceit, but it's laden with meaning: He makes light concrete. Or, more exactly, wood. He builds objects, like lamps and flashlights, from walnut and poplar, and he adds on the rays they cast.

"Dining Table" features a simple table and chairs made from poplar, positioned beneath an overhead lamp that sprays poplar light beams, cascading onto the table and chairs and toward the floor.

Light ordinarily denotes spiritual radiance. Expressed so solidly in wood, it becomes monstrous and threatening, engulfing tables and shooting from fixtures like - thank you, George Lucas - light sabers. While Foote's show is ambitious, he only begins to tap the possibility in his disturbing theme.

Also at Rhys, Ali Smith's abstract paintings look like cakes decorated by a crowd of preschoolers: wild colors, gashes of texture, awkward dollops of paint. One work, "Lost in Space," looks like "The Phantom of the Opera" staged in a Barbie Dream House: a hot-pink and purple structure underlies a swoop of heavy black and a crust of fire-engine red. Smith's driving principle doesn't seem to be composition or form - just excess.