

GALLERIES

Modern riffs on old ideas

By **Cate McQuaid** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 30, 2012

1

No art is simply, blithely contemporary. That would be like saying our parents had no influence on us. Today's art responds to and reacts against yesterday's art. "Covet: Art + Objects," an ambitious show of 40 works at Ferrin Gallery in Pittsfield, is an exhibition of homage. Curators Leslie Ferrin and Sienna Patti invited artists to visit museums, talk to curators, and find inspiration, and then to riff on the works that inspired them.

Ferrin Gallery specializes in three-dimensional work, particularly ceramics, and the clay works in "Covet" stand out. Painters have a tougher time of it, attempting to respond in original ways to artists such as Courbet and Sargent when the discourse about painting has moved so far since they were at work.

The discourse about clay has progressed, too, but the ceramicists here are not, mostly, responding to museum pieces in their own medium. They are taking off from paintings and prints, imbuing familiar two-dimensional styles with volume, texture, and wit.

Giselle Hicks, for instance, borrows from Flemish still life artist Nicolaes van



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Molly Hatch's "Lost Arcadia," part of "Covet: Art + Objects" at Ferrin Gallery in Pittsfield.

Veerendael's 1662 painting "A Bouquet of Flowers in a Crystal Vase," in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Hicks's breathtaking sculpture "and then it was still" drains all the color from van Veerendael's bouquet, mournfully offering it up in white vitreous china. Blossoms erupt from a vase and spill over a table. The vase and the table have pale blue drawings of the plants traced over their surfaces, as if to remind us that these strewn clay petals have just sprung into three-dimensionality.

An idyllic 18th-century drawing, Isaac de Moucheron's "Landscape With Architecture" (also from the Metropolitan's collection), is the source for Molly Hatch's "Lost Arcadia." Hatch serves up the magisterial landscape on a grid of 30 hand-painted ceramic dinner plates. The grid of circles cleverly breaks up and abstracts the scene, but doesn't abandon its coherence. Indeed, it spotlights the mark-making.

There's much more to see. "Covet" is up all summer, and in July and August, ArtBerkshires (www.artberkshires.com) will present museum tours, studio visits, dinners, and more in conjunction with the show.

Virtue in creative play

Candice Smith Corby and Doug Weathersby have both built forts in Boston galleries, with work that plunges into the nature of play. At Ellen Miller Gallery, Corby's show "Fortified" has at its center "Hiding Den," several chairs covered over with found textiles and a hand-painted sheet.

Visitors are welcome to crawl inside. I did, and sat in the dim light enjoying a particular kind of privacy that only such a dwelling can afford. It's a feeling of being hidden in plain sight that probably goes back to being a 2-year-old, and thinking you cannot be seen when you hold a napkin up in front of your face. "Hiding Den" is most explicitly a metaphor for internal space, a three-dimensional representation of imagination's laboratory, but it also toys with the charged intersection of public and private.

Corby's watercolor and gouache works on paper depict other such creations. They are not all forts, but they are all whimsical, and at the same time concerned with composition and abstraction. Space itself is a bit askew in "Her Tuffet and

Antimacassar,” in which a bamboo rod perches on a low stool Miss Muffet might have sat on, holding up a flowery quilt that joins up with a gray textile over chairs, and a glistening red one spread over a sofa. From the outside, Corby’s haphazard structures begin to look like crouching monsters.

“Bird Nest” depicts a small bird perched on a round, oversized cushion on a peppermint-striped chair, ringed with a striped blanket and topped with a parasol and cocktail umbrellas. This one suggests that some child’s play has made this chair protected and totemic, a ritual object. We are all artists as children, making meaning from whatever lies at hand. Corby’s work honors that.



“Bird Nest” from Candice Smith Corby’s show “Fortified” at Ellen Miller Gallery.

Doug Weathersby’s company, Environmental Services, will go just about anywhere to clean, organize, and make art out of what’s available. Weathersby is in residence at LaMontagne Gallery, cleaning out the storage area there, and turning the gallery upside down in the process. When I stopped by late last week, he had covered the walls of the gallery with cardboard and hung his favorite paintings up. In the center of the space, he had erected a kind of fort out of wooden crates, where many more paintings were stowed, and he had built a wall in the storage area.

It’s an ongoing performance. Weathersby had already made and destroyed works from all the dust he had vacuumed up, documenting with photos and videos as he goes along. He has created a mosaic-style wallpaper that documents the building of the wall. From noon to 6 p.m. on Saturday, he will host a “Paint Shed” event, at which

anyone can donate old cans of paint. The artist will create tarps made of the poured paint.

I've seen the finished product of a Weathersby cleanup before, but I had never seen it in process. It's what Corby depicts with her living-room forts, on a grand scale. Weathersby has made the space his own. It burgeons with fertile chaos. Order will come, but in the meantime, there's the heat of creation.

COVET — ART + OBJECTS

At: Ferrin Gallery,

437 North St., Pittsfield, through Sept. 2.

413-442-1622, www.ferringallery.com

CANDICE SMITH CORBY: Fortified

At: Ellen Miller Gallery,

38 Newbury St., through June 9. 617 536 4650, www.ellenmillergallery.com

DOUG WEATHERSBY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES: Spring Clean!

At: LaMontagne Gallery,

555 East 2nd St., South Boston, through June 9.

617-464-4640, www.lamontagnegallery.com

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