

Art Review: Associated Artists' Annual admirable and provocative



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Andy Starnes, Post-Gazette photos

One of the exhibition's few sculptures is Carol Stremple's ceramic "Flushable."

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The juror cuts may have been stringent, but the resultant 2005 Associated Artists of Pittsburgh Annual at The Andy Warhol Museum is an exhibition the 95-year-old organization can be proud of.

More than 450 works were submitted to the 95th Annual, and juror Terry Smith selected 74 by 48 artists, about half the number that hung in the 2004 show. That year, 155 works were chosen by that year's juror from more than 500 submissions. Memorial works by Edna Weber Judkis and Girts Purins are also included.

That the Associated invited Smith to shape the show -- he's the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, University of Pittsburgh -- indicates that it was looking for a critique, and the direction is a good one. Smith will hold a free gallery discussion at 7 p.m. Friday that promises to be rewarding for artists and visitors alike.

The majority of work, as in years past, is wall hung, though not necessarily two-dimensional, as with Peter Wargo's fine built pieces that combine primitive and contemporary formal sensibilities, and Marinda Stretavsky's ritualistic pulp and found object figures that speak to gender issues.

More lighthearted (perhaps) is Carole Stremple's ceramic "Flushable," one of the exhibition's few sculptures. A controlled but triumphant 41/2-foot-tall woman holds a wiggling tiny man in one hand over an actual toilet bowl.

Gender issues also figure into Shawn Quinlan's fiber "Creepy Cake: Fear Quilt Series," which garnered two prizes including the Carnegie Museum of Art Purchase Award. Quinlan's star has been rising meteorically in recent years, and the recognition is well deserved.

He also exhibits "Jesus Get Your Gun," which some viewers may find offensive, along with Terri Perpich's "The Power of Images," a bravado work that seems to reference the Terri Schiavo ordeal, or Jeff Zets' commentary on race relations, "Graduation," or Penny Mateer's fiber "Election 2004," which features a patchwork of images of the 15 anti-Bush posters the Partisan Project distributed before the last presidential election.

But what these artists are trying to provoke is conversation, and their intentions, along with the art objects, are admirable.

Show highlights include Peter West's agitated "Waking Dream," an 87-by-42-inch silk screen and acrylic work with appropriated Asian imagery, waves, Chinese characters and perhaps the serial numbers on American bills, which could reference tsunami relief, trade deficits or China's ultimate financing of the U.S.-Iraq conflict.

Akiko Kotani's 110-by-96-by 6-inch tri-paneled silk on linen "Storm -- Daniel," in contrast, exudes quiet if monumental presence in a style that's

uniquely hers. Kotani, who is in the "Masters Exhibit V" at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, also received two awards, including the Westmoreland Museum of American Art Exhibition Award.

A beautifully conceived and rendered trio of small paintings, each titled "Prima Materia," by newcomer Fabrizio Gerbino has garnered much attention. Gerbino, who recently moved here from Florence, Italy, with his wife, a Pittsburgh native, and child, will also display his paintings in the Three Rivers Arts Festival Artists Market Friday through next Wednesday, booth No. G2.

Finally, exceptional works by Tim Fabian, Karen Kaighin and Richard Stoner beg for an expanded exhibition devoted to these three photographers -- Fabian's compositional gaming (e.g. "2+1+1"), playful and intelligent; Stoner's dreamy evocative watery expanses, a departure from his Western Pennsylvania scenes; and Kaighin's lustrous glass and water, suggestive and desirable.

Also noteworthy are Mark Weleski's optically charged, shaped-canvas paintings, which hang across from Ruth Levine's serene works; Mark Parrish's drawings of Americana; Joan Brechin Sonnenberg's abstracted anguish that underlies hope; Tom Davies' unblinking photographs of transit environments; Adrienne Heinrich's pensive cast rubber "Archives"; Sarah Elizabeth Jones Williams' saucy conceptual photograph "Supreme"; and Tina Brewer's celebratory fiber "Formation."

As is evident, members' expression, media, experience and intent are widespread (not all exhibitors are members).

Associated members have begun to ask which conversations they want to participate in -- regional, national, global, gallery, museum? Who's their audience? Who are their patrons? Should the Annual be exclusive or inclusive? These are big questions, and the Associated isn't the only arts organization in the country asking them.

As the Associated completes the last lap of its centennial, it's redefining itself in a time of formal plurality, Web marketing and diverse voice and motivation. Open discussions with the membership and receptivity to input from jurors and museum professionals will keep this venerable institution in the running.

The Annual continues through June 19 at 117 Sandusky St., North Shore. At 5:30 p.m. Friday collector Richard Weisman will speak about his paintings from Warhol's "Athletes Series 1977-1978," which are at the museum through July 3. Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday and until 10 p.m. Friday. Admission is \$10, seniors \$7, students and children 3 and above \$6, members free, half-price 5-10 p.m. Friday. For information, call 412-237-8300 or visit www.warhol.org.

American Beauty

A reminder that the sumptuous "American Beauty, Painting & Sculpture From the Detroit Institute of Arts 1770-1920," including several iconic images, is at The Frick Art Museum only through June 12. The \$10 admission is suggested, not required. For information, 412-371-0600.



"Prima Maeria" is one of three small paintings by Fabrizio Gerbino.

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