

Strangeness dominates juried show at Boca Museum of Art

Written by Gretel Sarmiento on 03 June 2013.



The joy of writing about art comes from the same place I imagine a curator's joy comes from: discovering something truly interesting.

I was hoping to find this among the 149 pieces encompassing the 62nd All Florida Juried Competition and Exhibition at the Boca Raton Museum of Art. The show attracted more than 1,600 submissions. What I saw was art reflecting strangeness and the reclusive side of the mind.

Monster and Me (2013) depicts a repulsive creature sitting on a couch opposite to a thin, sad girl. She is half-naked and wears her straight black hair down. The room looks depressing and is flooding, but the water has only reached her ankles. She looks worn out, as if paralyzed by the grotesque animal that seems to be expanding across the couch like a growing cancerous tumor. The girl's right leg shows sign of the infection. This is a picture of sexual abuse, by Boca Raton artist Msou Filan.

A similar raw piece by Filan, also featuring deformity, appears later in the show. *Floating* (2012) is about abandoned babies, left neglected, and fetuses used as test specimens because they didn't develop right. The round curved shapes and deformed masses appear floating against a light background. The piece has a Lucian Freud quality to it.

"If a work does not seduce with mystery or surprise, or beauty or vision, why bother looking at all?" reads the welcoming message for the exhibit now running through July 14. The words belong to Mark Scala, this year's juror and chief curator at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville. He chose the 122 Florida artists represented in this highly personal show. They, in turn, represent more than 30 cities.



From up close, *Barely Seen* (2013) looks to be a satellite photo featuring a crack on the surface of some distant planet. You could walk away without realizing that crack is actually a drip of water traveling down on a foggy window. If you step back and continue to look you will notice a nose emerging followed by vague lips and the shape of an eye. The photograph is by Lois Alexander-Mandel, of Boynton Beach. I like it because in giving us so little it leaves much up to the imagination.

I could not keep my eyes from a series of pencil works by self-taught David Alan Sincavage, of Boca Raton. Darker and lighter lines give the illusion of layers of flesh and skin caving in while the presence of leaves and plant life speaks of nature. These striking, heavily detailed drawings titled *As Youth Runs Away* and *The Prayers of Mother Earth* are hard to describe. They are definitely meant to be seen.

So is the work that resulted from the collaboration of two Jacksonville artists, Craig Erskine and William McMahan. On display are three scenes of a piece titled *Auctus Metamorphosis* (2013). After passing plates back and forth, what emerged was a picture of relaxed and constrained figures, shapes that appear complete and incomplete.

In one of the scenes, a tree appears half-finished and half broken into segments and just as a branch ends it converts into a human figure. While looking at this etching, Goya's etchings came to mind. While being less dark, *Metamorphosis* is puzzling and terrifying in its own way.

Just look at the central image, where a mass whiter than the rest of the picture appears resembling a sac. It seems intact. Whatever is inside is still developing. What could it be? And when will it be ready to come out?



Gabrielle Wood, of Miami, presents us with two short but graphic videos that test our stomachs and hers. In *Disrupted Pleasure: Sweet* (2012) she stands behind a table where a birthday cake sits. While looking directly to the camera, she slowly unbuttons part of her peachy dress to reveal a gross opening in her body. Wood grabs a piece of cake with a fork and begins feeding her body through it. The artist used her background in ceramics to achieve the realistic silicone prosthetic that stars again in another video titled *Disrupted Pleasure: Savory*. This time she feeds it popcorn while laying on a couch and watching TV.

Here is an artist, with unapologetic in-your-face attitude, challenging us to keep watching and question our concept of beauty and femininity while also commenting on the American diet. Not everything in the show is dark and sarcastic though. There is room for abstract paintings, landscapes, panoramic photographs and installations that are even funny.

Take Ari Hirschman's *Blink* piece which features cracked eggs ready for the pan. Forget milk. Got egg white? If, as the artist suggests, this is a representation of the human figure, I am afraid staying fresh and firm is not an option. Some day we will go bad, get rotten, loosen up in some areas and turn green rather than stay a nice yellow.

The mystery and seduction, however, begins and stops with the works. Everywhere else you look the museum offers clarity and an array of explanations, almost like a DVD with behind-the-scene extra features. There are statements by the juror, Scala, speaking to the reasons and motives behind his picks.

"The artists in this exhibition were selected not just because they were the best...but because their art could be shown in a museum or gallery anywhere in the world without there being a question of its aesthetic merit," Scala is quoted saying.



It is interesting to learn the place a juror comes from when preferring this over that. The problem is it goes on. Just in case we were wondering, the juror views the submissions on the computer through an electronic database. Later, he/she is to see the already-chosen works in person to pick the best in the show. All of this and more we learn from reading the brochure.

Personally, I wished for a little less information and more mystery to match the quality of the show's content. I have seen activities and lectures created, specifically, to address the way a juror picks works and also as ways to complement an exhibit. And while the effort to educate the public is sincerely appreciated, I believe not every area needs to be covered. From the total number of works submitted and the final number selected, visitors can quickly gather they are looking at carefully-chosen work of superior skill.

When it comes to works that stimulate questions through their weirdness and personal touch, is better to preserve the atmosphere/habitat for those questions to grow. The enigma of certain works of art lives longer when the answers are not provided as to how they came to be and how they got here.

The 62nd Annual All Florida Juried Exhibition runs through July 14 at the Boca Raton Museum of Art. Tickets: \$8; seniors, \$6; students with ID, \$5. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday; noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; also until 8 p.m. on the first Wednesday of every month. Call 392-2500 or visit www.bocamuseum.org.

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