

Review: "bau5/... stages ..." by Abby Luby

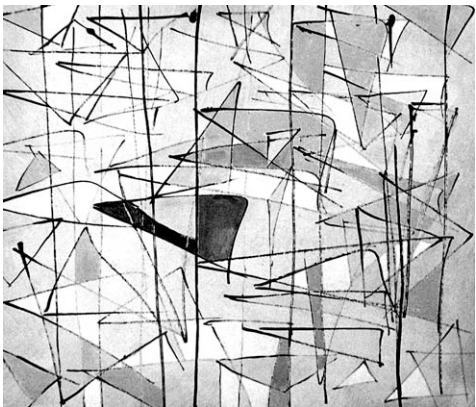
'STAGES' STRUCK

The four artists whose work in on exhibit at Beacon Artist Union represent a unique diversity of talent.

For the visual artist, inspiration unfurls from color, a concept, the written word or a quick glance over the shoulder. In the process of digesting and reconstructing the world, creativity becomes a rhythmic two-step that sways between living and recording, growing, changing, re-creating again. The fruits of this passion, when seen publicly, carry the creative process full circle in allowing the viewer a unique perspective that intuits his own new look at the world.

Different mediums, such as painting or photography, are vehicles artists use to channel their impressions. A diverse exhibit that uses multiple genres of painting and photography by different artists can successfully play off one another, co-opting a greater perspective, a wider vision.

The current exhibit at the Beacon Artist Union (bau), "bau 5/... stages ..." effectively melds and presents four diverse artists whose work obliquely connects creativity with conceptual themes of time, space, process and memory. The artists are painters Donald Alter, Claude van Lingen and Harald Plochberger, and photographer Melissa Greaves.



Colors dance on two of Donald Alter's canvases. His figurative paintings of rich reds, purples and oranges swirl to the beat of the cubist genre, eliciting a vibrant, clattering world where shapes interweave and playfully overlap. But in a later work, "Still Life 01," Alter pulls back from the intensity of color with elegantly muted cubed shapes offering a sense of calm respite. Alter, who studied color with Joseph Albers at the Black Mountain School, said, "Color can be too seductive; I want to get to the meat of the

piece." He layers other canvases with paper projections that exude from painted shapes out into real space. The collage "Circus 01" alternates spirals and diamond patterns with shadowed profiles, nudging hands and legs, leading the eye through a flurry of movement.

In contrast to Alter is Claude van Lingen's conceptual work that offers a visual delineation of time. How do we gauge moments, weeks, years, eons?

In "1,000 years from now - not less and not more," three rectangular framed grids with a box for each year register time for 1,000 years, with each year marked in the different frames with a splotch of red, yellow or blue paint, respectively. The piece was started in 1986, so most of the frame is blank. The piece suspends belief from the daily routine of crossing off days on a calendar to a vague but plausible idea that someone's hand (who?) would be filling in part of the grid during the next 10 centuries, jolting us into some great unknown of the future.

"I want the spots to link people and events over linear time," says van Lingen, who replicates that concept in his "Millennium Series," where he amassed layers - inches thick - of paint on three small linen canvases over a period of three years. Each layer is a number from a single year starting with 2000 and going to 2009, each painted with a basic palette of red, yellow and blue.

The process is what engages here: van Lingen repeatedly dipped his brush and painted each number of the year, let it dry for a week and repeated the process all over again. "Each time the number of the year is painted, it is layering, as in memory layers," says van Lingen. Repeatedly bringing the artist to the waiting canvas on a weekly basis year after year could blur time, and enslave the artist, but van Lingen uses this approach again in his piece "I am right - you are wrong." On a white, large, layered stack of paper he writes the words "I am right - you are wrong" with a soft graphite stick. Starting at the top in large scrawling script, the words overlap and thicken as he works down to the bottom where heavier lines converge into massive darkness, obliterating any sense of what the words say. Eventually, and violently, the paper is shredded, revealing layers of paper underneath. The politically charged words give claim to a dysfunctional world where



Left: Artists exhibiting in "bau 5/... stages ..." are (from left to right) Harald Plochberger, Don Alter, Melissa Greaves and Claude van Lingen. Below left: Harald Plochberger, "Vienna 02," sepia, gouache on board. Below right: Donald Alter, "Circus 01," collage.

"bau 5/... stages ..."
Beacon Artist Union, 161 Main Street, Beacon
Through June 5
Hours: Sat. & Sun., noon-6 p.m.; and by appointment
845.591.2331
www.beaconartistunion.com



relinquishing the need to be right to better understand our differences is continually a challenge.

Layering in Harald Plochberger's work is subtler, delicate. In "Vienna 02" and "Vienna 03," floating, lazily drawn triangles in sepia ink and gouache move in and out, bend, undulate. Pastel shapes slide under darker ones and sparse, black lines inform the shapes of their zigzag connection, creating a soft push-pull for the viewer. Plochberger's other, more conceptual work is more literary based, connecting to Greek mythology, where exacting, well-delineated triangles intersect with straight character-labeled lines, plotting the convergence of their inter-relationships. The computer-created "Agamemnon 01" is a startling de-mystification of the complexities of Greek mythology.

The photographs in Melissa Greaves' "Scenes Unseen" are of brief, fleeting moments that we usually dismiss, unless we find them in a frame. Greaves says her black-and-white photos are "part of our everyday lives ... that are captured," adding that "these are images not created; I stumble upon them like a ghost picking up images that people leave behind."

Truly, Greaves' camera pauses the images that confuse and confront, the ones we seek to avoid. "WSP" is a photo of young adults, some standing on a city bench looking determinedly in one direction oblivious to a man laying face down at their feet. They choose not to notice him or even wonder: Is he asleep? Is he dead? If we were there, we

would probably put our own blinders on and keep walking. But as voyeurs safe in a gallery setting, we can allow ourselves to be shocked and concerned enough to reflect how we pigeon-hole humanity. To that end, Greaves says, "Most people are numb to what's around them."

In "Mother and Child," a contemporary pieta, a dazed mother in a subway car holds a sleeping child spread across her lap. Standing over them, a passenger is reading; all are cohorts to subway somnambulism in varying degrees.

Today, individual expression in any of the arts can be quickly usurped by the drive to "sell one's art," and compromising one's unique style for a price tag. It's rare to find four diverse artists in one space, where that space is primarily motivated to provide artists with an outlet, an audience. This is bau's raison d'être, as is seen in the current show.

Plochberger, one of the founding members of bau, says, "bau allows artists to show what they want to show - unlike a commercial gallery where art has to pay the rent. We can have a diverse show, bring different art to the venue. It's not like a regular gallery; here we are peeling away the surface - the slick surface - and we are looking underneath." ■

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