

Opening Fantasy's Gate:

Art by

Nora Crain
and Richard Carrazzini

By Abby Luby





L, NORA CRAIN; R, RICHARD CARRAZZINI, PHOTO BY BOB SCHULER

A dynamic and wildly stunning show of local artists Nora Crain and Richard Carrazzini will open the fall season at the Muroff Kotler Visual Arts Gallery at SUNY Ulster. The show, entitled “Just Friends: Drawings by Nora Crain; Paintings by Richard Carrazzini,” pairs Crain’s dramatic, black and white drawings with Carrazzini’s vibrantly colorful paintings.

There is a raw fluidity emanating from these works that taps into our sensorial core and sends us to another place—the very thing we crave from fine art. That Crain and Carrazzini have divergently contrasting styles is the strong appeal, says Gallery Coordinator Susan Jeffers.

“We like to show artists who have different approaches to similar themes. There is a connection (with both artists) in terms of inner and outer. Nora’s work really reaches your gut in terms of form and an interior world. Richie’s paintings reach your heart through his characters and their connection to others.”

The enormity of Crain’s untitled charcoal drawings is at once mesmerizing. Reaching from floor to ceiling, the swishes and swirls transport us to a clandestine world of floating amoeba and weighty tuberous limbs thinning out to feathery tendrils fanning a primordial sea. Sharply defined edges and lines punch out layers of erasures, creating





UNTITLED, NORA CRAIN

rich, sensual textures and varied tonalities. There is a sense of the ‘embryonic,’ as Crain embeds knobby, corpuscular shapes within mysterious landscapes reminiscent of flora and fauna, where a play of shadowy recesses and pale forms suggest a primal morphology.

Largely gestural, Crain works with white and black charcoal—half the time on a step ladder to fully realize her ideas on the large expanse of paper. In her studio, small sketches are tacked up as prompts that feed her own creative dance of rubbing out and filling in lines and shapes—a process to access her “unconscious.”

“I work on several small sketches leading up to the work,” says Crain. “Many of these shapes come from early memory. Some are weathered holes and spaces; some are based in nature or have evolved from sea references. Most have become something totally ‘other.’”

The mystique of Crain’s work presents as an uncanny double entendre. Is it the thick, graceful walled feet of trees morphing into human anatomy? Are we seeing a microscopic enlargement of a nerve synapse that secretly spawned in a cavernous underworld? Is the furry amoeba floating toward us, replete with crisp, hallowed holes, perhaps a mythical sea creature?

Crain’s abstract images allows us to find our own personal path of wonder as does the work of Richard Carrazzini, whose figurative paintings weave together autobiography, literature, random memory and dream

states. A true colorist, Carrazzini’s works are elegiac, created with a delicate hand, parting fantasy’s curtain onto another world. Although these are Carrazzini’s narratives, the images spark our imagination



and personal interpretations. Characters engage us with their direct gaze amidst a circus of recurring symbols—pale, sketchy houses, birds, animals, shadowy, unfinished figures and a scrawled word or two.

These paintings are fun, but not without social rebuke. When Carrazzini's mother went into a nursing home at age 91, it stoked his criticism of the unrequited role of domesticity. "Carmella (Mom), After the Fall" shows his mother on a nursing home bed, with gentle, dark skinned hands ready to help her, and two fingers reaching from the bottom belonging to Carrazzini's father, who lost three fingers in an accident. The woman is clearly slipping away despite the outreach. Carrazzini says his mother's last years in a nursing home belied her devotion to family life.

"Here is a woman who was married 66 years, lived for her family and put her whole life out there. Then she dies alone in a nursing home surrounded by people she doesn't know. We get trapped in domesticity where roles are shallow, but it's all we know."



Carrazzini says the painting is prescient. "I painted this quite a while before my mother looked like this. When she first went into the nursing home, she actually got better, but the last three or four months of her life she turned into that painting. She was 93 when she died."

In "Lucia Is A Dancer," Carrazzini painted his daughter Lucia, statuesque against a sea green, global horizon; solid and unmoved by the reeling, off-kilter motion from other circular forms. "Olympia, You Is My Woman Now," is Carrazzini's version of "Olympia," Édouard Manet's 1863, then controversial painting of a black servant catering to a white prostitute. The title is a take-off on "Bess, You is my woman now" from the opera by George Gershwin that portrays Southern, African-American life in the 1920's, a subtle theme that buttresses Carrazzini's comment on bourgeois roles.

Here, he puts himself in the painting, serving a black woman who is languid, voluptuous, half smirking at the role reversal and the offer of watermelon. A white cat silently witnesses the switcheroo of a stereotypical white male, undressed and catering to a dark-skinned lady. A scruffy, half-painted house looms large, surrounded by crimson flames slicing into the blue sky; a floating window is dreamily unscathed by the fire.

This is a must-see show. The contrast between the work by Crain and Carrazzini will undoubtedly stand up to repeated viewings—you're guaranteed to see something different on a second or third visit.

"Just Friends: Drawings by Nora Crain; Paintings by Richard Carrazzini" will be exhibited at Muroff Kotler Visual Arts Gallery, on the campus of SUNY Ulster, Rte. 209 and Cottekill Rd., Stone Ridge, September 2 through 30. Opening reception is Friday September 2, 5-7 PM. Visit www.sunyulster.edu or call 845.687.5113 for more information. Gallery hours are Mo-Fr 11 AM- 3 PM.

THIS PG: CARMELLA (MOM), AFTER THE FALL
OPPOSITE PG: LUCIA IS A DANCER, RICHARD CARRAZZINI