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Democracy Dies in Darkness

In the galleries: Blurring the boundary between sculpture and space

By **Mark Jenkins**

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Many of the sculptures in “6@35 — Fabricating Culture” incorporate objects or archetypes that are commonplace and easily recognizable. Vienne Rea erects ladders. Gil Ugiansky balances cubes. Wilfredo Valladares has made charred rolling pins into a sort of signature. As arrayed by these and three other artists, such elemental components invoke ones that are even more primal, notably fire and air.

The show, on display at the Zenith Gallery-programmed lobby gallery of 1111 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, marks the 35th anniversary of the Washington Sculptors Group. That organization has more than 150 members, many of whom make art that has little in common with the pieces shown here. Yet “6@35” is a fine and suitably diverse introduction to the group, and its mostly large-scale work fills the spacious lobby authoritatively.

Rea’s dream-inspired ladders are built of disparate materials, including tinted translucent acrylic and steel pillars that support rope rungs. The largest has the dimensions of a functional ladder, but is made of mirrored acrylic. Ugiansky works mostly in metal, contrasting regular or eccentric shapes and highly polished or rough-textured surfaces. Both artists use simple forms to define the space around them, as well as reflective exteriors to blur the boundaries between the objects and their surroundings. These sculptures call as much attention to what’s not there as to what is.

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Like Ugiansky, Luc Fiedler taunts gravity with top-heavy arrangements, although he fuses fabricated metal with natural substances and found objects. Most strikingly, Fiedler fixes a cone of partly decayed wood into a circle of metal spokes. He calls the result “Wheel,” but it can also be seen as a wizened eye.

Allen Linder and Mitra Lore make figurative pieces of rather different dispositions. Linder’s bulbous, modestly sized figures have an engagingly cartoonish quality, even if they’re rendered not with pen and ink, but with bronze and pewter inlaid with marble and ivory. Drawn in space with thin lines of shaped steel, Lore’s sculptures include a lion who’s formidable if partly see-through. Where Linder’s creatures are small but solid, Lore’s are simultaneously strong and delicate.

The show’s largest piece is Valladares’s “Taller,” a three-sided enclosure studded with sewing implements and other domestic talismans. Since parts of it are scorched, the assemblage appears to be a place of both creation and destruction. Heat also forged the artist’s cast-aluminum heads of Mesoamerican immortals, who wear metal headdresses of corn, berries and other natural bounty. Rather than organic or mathematical, Valladares’s archetypes are cultural.

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6@35 — *Fabricating Culture* Through Jan. 19 at Zenith Gallery Space, 1111 Pennsylvania Ave. NW.

Medellin printmakers

The 18-printmaker show now at the IDB Staff Association Art Gallery is drawn from a 2018 exhibition in Medellin, Colombia. In a way, though, the original event began in Washington, where it was conceived by D.C. artist Felix Angel, who was born in Colombia. The sweeping Medellin show was dubbed an “encounter” — “encuentro” in Spanish — so this smaller follow-up is titled “Beyond the ‘Encuentro.’ ”

The work is diverse in both style and theme, and only a few pieces have the tropical vibe that might be expected. Victoria Ortiz’s woodcut of three children, two parrots and a bicycle amid jungle foliage distills the scene to bright colors and bold black lines. One of Jessica Paola Sanchez’s linoleum cuts depicts an ear of corn on a stalk; the other, more freely, birds and fish. The streamlined vignettes of Monica Lorenza Taborda G. feature earthy colors and textures and show a command of shape and line.

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Among the most realistic pictures are those by three artists whose work is monochromatic or nearly so: Ana Fernandez’s near-classical etchings of children, one with sprigs of green; Maria Lopez’s elegantly composed close-up of a dog, its head down; and Diego Arango’s stark arrangements of skulls, representing what the titles call “displaced persons.” Similar in style if not subject, Lopez’s and Arango’s prints hang together compatibly.

There may be no political significance to Male Correa's silk-screens of twinned girls, one of whom has nearly evaporated, leaving just her clothing and eyes amid the watery hues. But ominousness is clearly intended in Alvaro Botero Gallego's impressionist black-and-white visions of descending missiles, their explosive power implied by overprinted blocks of red. Botero Gallego also carves linoleum to make prints, and his strong cuts convey both immediacy and potential violence.

***Beyond the 'Encuentro'** Through Jan. 10 at IDB Staff Association Art Gallery, 1300 New York Ave. NW (13th Street entrance).*

Wickerham & Lomax

"Time Capsule," at Cultural DC's pop-up gallery in Union Market, is a mixed-media critique of contemporary consumerism, American politics and Internet media. It's also a boutique.

The term the Baltimore-based duo of Wickerham & Lomax (Daniel and Malcolm, respectively) use for the temporary shop is "Spootique," apparently playing on the word "spoof." Such mashed-up language is typical of the artists' ongoing projects, which include an epic science-fiction poem about aliens who visit Earth as tourists and an under-construction website whose name, "Bloop," melds "Baltimore" with "Goop," Gwyneth Paltrow's self-care brand.

The spootique offers six photographic portraits, excerpts from the poem and video of mass-market products, as well as Wickerham & Lomax-branded T-shirts that are for sale, not just for show. The shirts (and some colorful handbags) hang on anti-riot security fences, which make just one of several references to societal conflict. The portraits, huge like museum pieces but square like those on Instagram, feature defiant-looking young people framed by such props as U.S. flags and copies of the Mueller Report. Atop the glossy images are partly wiped-away suds, invoking Baltimore "squeegee kids" whose offers to wash car windows aren't always appreciated.

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Wickerham and Lomax, who have worked as a team for a decade, studied painting together at Maryland Institute College of Art. But there are no brushstrokes, or other evidence of the human hand, in this installation. It sports the clean lines and computer-generated precision of no-spoofing commercial graphics. “Time Capsule” is multi-level, but its top layer is all corporate sheen.

Wickerham & Lomax: Time Capsule Through Jan. 12 at Cultural DC pop-up, 1258 Fourth St. NE.

In The Galleries

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