

In the galleries: A towering exhibit offers a new definition of domestic life

By Mark Jenkins

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The “QT” in Wickerham and Lomax’s “Domestic QT and the Spatial Anomalies” — a title as jam-packed as their work — stands for “quarantine.” But the Baltimore duo began making these mixed-media sculptural collages before the pandemic dramatically altered daily life. Then it did, “reframing the show as prophetic,” the artists write in an extensive glossary to the references, both personal and cultural, in the Von Ammon Co. exhibition.

Domesticity takes many guises in Daniel Wickerham and Malcolm Lomax’s towering assemblages, which rely heavily on photographic images but also include 3-D objects. Among the homey motifs are pets, TV shows, cocktails and Baltimore places and pals. The assemblages’s see-through portals include a doggy door and intricate cutouts, but some possible passageways are blocked by wooden 2-by-4s or slabs of blank plywood. These barriers suggest containment and isolation, and also provide a breather from the profusion of pictures and items.

Sometimes the duo’s domestic concerns merge, as in several pieces that include silver dog bowls filled with “presentation” (that is, fake) liquid, ice cubes and fruit slices. A plastic mocktail is just one absurdist touch in an array that offers a rattlesnake as a possible house pet and names half the artworks after people who appeared MTV’s “The Real World: Seattle.” (The show ran in 1998, the year both Wickerham and Lomax turned 12, an impressionable age.)

The artists are “influenced by queer theory, speculative fiction, human geography and the sociopolitical as it relates to urban space,” their biography notes. “Black Vulcan Sleeping Aid,” which includes Black Star Trek characters and a playful simulation of the solar system with various everyday round objects, was inspired by a controversial (and thus unproduced) AIDS-themed script for “Star Trek: The Next Generation.” Two other pieces, “An Invitation Between the Door and Bed” and “Nathan Blackburn,” are symbolic self-portraits of Lomax and Wickerham, respectively.

Without the glossary, “Domestic QT” is hard to read. But clearly legible are the duo’s aesthetic hyperactivity, neo-baroque sensibility and simultaneous attraction to and dissatisfaction with digital image-making. If free-associating collages are the equivalent of random Web-surfing, the tidiness of the compositions is offset by surrounding them with found objects, blocks of lumber and strands of beads. Transforming digital pictures into free-standing sculpture, Wickerham and Lomax reveal a yearning to escape virtual reality and live in the real world.

Wickerham & Lomax: Domestic QT and the Spatial Anomalies Through Jan. 17 at Von Ammon Co., 3330 Cady’s Alley NW.

Much of the work involves design, assembly and piece-making. Sarah J. Hill's *Stasis* is a large fabric square made of smaller squares, neatly geometric yet intentionally rough in execution. Alanna Reeves's embroidered monoprints contrast grids and organic forms. Madeline A. Stratton's cartoonish, candy-colored domestic interiors are smaller versions of the work reviewed in this column in November.

Light, shadow and dangling materials make the work of Shana Kohnstamm, Sarah Stefana Smith and Steve Wanna the show's most mercurial. Made of wool, wire and resin, Kohnstamm's "Gravitas" suspends three organic-looking sacs from metallic discs in exquisite tension. Smith's "Flag to the Abyss" is a banner of black fabric and plastic, evoking death but also infinity. Wanna's Christo-like "Within Without" encloses the stairway entrance to the second-floor gallery in gossamer fabric, outlined by floor-level light strips. The installation, accompanied by its own discreet soundtrack, retains the right angles of the space it defines, yet its hard lines are gently blurred with every ripple of air.

Sparkplug: States of Being Reopening Jan. 15 and running through Feb. 7 at District of Columbia Arts Center, 2438 18th St. NW. Open by appointment.

Dwayne Eugene Martin

Hands and hand prints, usually red but in one notable instance white, are motifs in Dwayne Eugene Martin's paintings. These images might symbolize many things, but among the unambiguous meanings is work. The artist's Honfleur Gallery show, "Rise," features pictures of African American exploitation, rendered by Martin with evident struggle and even anger. For the D.C. native, painting is a form of physical exertion, akin to the toil of the Black people whose efforts are suggested (but not literally shown) in "The Hands That Built America."

Far from a realist, Martin combines graffiti's childlike directness with abstract expressionism's spontaneity. The paintings' backgrounds feature hard-edge, bright-colored patterning, punctuated by looser gestures and occasional text. When Martin does depict a full human body, such as the manacled one in the potent "Enslaved," it's in the form of a black or brown stick figure with a circular head.

"Enslaved" is one of four large paintings on unstretched canvas that hang freely rather than hug the gallery wall. The informal presentation complements Martin's style, which is visceral and improvisational. The way the paintings ripple in space suits their open-ended energy.

Dwayne Eugene Martin: Rise Through Jan. 9 at Honfleur Gallery, 1241 Good Hope Rd. SE.
