



“NOTTE,” 2014

Betty Merken

OIL ON CANVAS, 40" x 32"

PHOTO COURTESY LAURA RUSSO GALLERY AND THE ARTIST

04-14-15, three diagonal shapes, geometric although far from razor-edged, leak color in sensual drips of aquamarine, forest, and citrine, oozing over an excavated background of earth tones. A duet between perfect forms and calculatedly imperfect rendering, the work balances visual sophistication with childlike naïveté. In the painting *Notte*, 04-14-14a, a bold gesture at the top of the picture plane fractures into a rain shower of drips, which cascade down the remainder of the canvas. The pronounced verticality of this motif asserts itself before a background of horizontal brushstrokes, evoking the brushed surface of florentined metal. Overall, Merken's color palette is muted, calming and serene, with the notable exceptions of the fluorescent pink outline in *In the Pink*, 08-13-12 and the aggressive mint green in *Palimpsest* 08-13-06.

With their rectilinear compositions and rhythmic blocks of color, the artist's monotypes reference historical antecedents such as Ellsworth Kelly and, in the four-part *Structure* series (complete with "zip"-like lines bisecting color fields), Barnett Newman. Notably, the forms' contours in the works on paper, like those in the paintings, are not fastidiously hard-edged, despite their overarching geometricism; within the squares and rectangles, a uniform saturation at each shape's center gives way toward the edges to an airy, powdery diffusion—like a deep lake slowly evaporating inward from its shoreline. A related effect appears in *Meditative Intervals II*, 11-13-02, in which porous transitions be-

tween hues evoke the feathered, atomized effects of airbrushing. The exhibition's formal preoccupation with density and structure yielding to oxidation, lent the show an elegiac air, evocative of the work's Italianate origins. The viewer sensed that shapes and colors might stand in for once-glorious buildings—and those who lived and worked within them—succumbing to the tragic beauty of decay.

—RICHARD SPEER

SEATTLE

Ryan Molenkamp at Linda Hodges Gallery

In the face of rapid urban and suburban development encroaching upon nature in the Pacific Northwest, a number of artists, including Ryan Molenkamp, whose work is now view at Linda Hodges, have adopted a cool, detached attitude toward landscape. Once the darling of 19th-century East Coast landscape masters such as Sanford Gifford and Albert Bierstadt, the nation's northern territories are now so far beyond the Eden it was compared to at the time that all one can do is measure and document them.

Molenkamp's second solo gallery show since his Bryan Ohno debut in 2011 is a mock-geological survey of volcanoes in various stages of eruption. He is not the first artist to go there. Shortly after the 1980 Mt. St. Helens explosion, Linda Farris Gallery and others or-

ganized group shows as responses that included the photo-assemblage sculptures of Barbara Noah and striking black-and-white photographs by Emmet Gowin and Frank Gohlke. Softer but no less alarming, Molenkamp's ten acrylics on panel and three gouaches on paper offer differing perspectives on peaks, including Mt. Rainier (last erupted possibly in 1850); Mt. Fuji (1707) and an unspecified mountain in Yellowstone National Park. A few, like *Fear of Volcanoes Nos. 7, 8 and 13* (all works are 2014), are tight close-ups with thin plumes of smoke emitted in a stream. *No. 8's* strict black and gray sections suggest human development right up to the summit; its simplicity and craggy peak also recall Classical Chinese landscape painting.

Molenkamp, 37, has explored other various natural phenomena in earlier shows concentrating on the San Juan Islands, empty city real estate lots, flood plains and marine crises, but the *Fear of Volcanoes* series is his most extended and sustained body of work. He has been included in group shows in New York City, Oregon and Wisconsin. The most atypical work, *Super Volcano Yellowstone*, has a blunt base of rubble and a central up-shooting square of speckled magma. Formally brilliant and more chromatically nuanced, Molenkamp could be headed toward even greater abstraction.

—MATTHEW KANGAS



“FEAR OF VOLCANOES 8,” 2014, **Ryan Molenkamp**

ACRYLIC ON PANEL, 24" x 24"

PHOTO: COURTESY LINDA HODGES GALLERY



INSTALLATION VIEW "ANGLE OF REPOSE," 2014
Gail Grinnell

PHOTO: COURTESY BOISE ART MUSEUM

BOISE, ID

Gail Grinnell: "Angle of Repose" at Boise Art Museum

Gail Grinnell's site-specific installation currently on view at Boise Art Museum continues a BAM curatorial focus on presenting innovative sculptural works enabled by the length, breadth, and height of its impressive, sun-bathed Sculpture Court. This Seattle-based artist has fabricated a lightweight, seemingly fragile, yet imposing structure made from 600 yards of translucent seam-stress interfacing, held together by long crocheting pins. Her resilient ribbons of treated, spun-bound fabric are dyed with tea, coffee, or India ink to provide a palette of browns, grays, and black, along with acrylic pastels and white. With these, she has woven an elaborate design in the shape of a cornucopian horn which occupies the length of the 80-foot space. In presenting this traditional symbol of harvest and plenty, the artist employs the physics of balance and gravity to achieve a large-scale, biomorphic cocoon at rest, ergo the title.

"In the simplest terms, everything I do is a drawing," says Grinnell. The point is driven home in "Angle of Repose," both by the charcoal project studies on view, and the black-and-white contour lines of the interfacing that form the substantive underpinning of her three-dimensional composition. Metaphorically, the imagery is grounded in family history and personal experience, e.g., her education in dressmaking and pattern work under her mother. A homespun aesthetic and work ethic is reflected not only in Grinnell's materials and attention to detail, but in her reverent deconstruction of the garment-making process. Beyond that, Grinnell's iconography contains other allusions. The content is botanically profuse. Entwined vines, branches and leaves give the installation an arboreal aspect. Yet, less promising omens of the future linger. Scattered, stark-white (as if sun-bleached) depictions of mammalian vertebrae imply biological casual-

ties. And while the installation's inviting, ground-level front end beckons the viewer, up in the narrower, darker reaches of the installation, the shadows hint at a potentially troubling turn in this paradise.

Sculpturally, Grinnell demonstrates a kinship with the late post-minimalist artist Eva Hesse. They share a visual vocabulary and an intuitive, introspective approach to process. Both artists rely on the fluid contours of the natural world, and the juxtaposition of disparate parts from a transitory reality. Equally intriguing, "Angle of Repose" is the expression of a tradition-based, nonpolitical feminism, which makes contemporary the positive historical aspects of the female experience.

—CHRISTOPHER SCHNOOR

DENVER

"Takeover" at Gildar Gallery

Gallery director Adam Gildar has made a name for himself in Denver by focusing on content-heavy conceptual art. While at an art fair in Miami, Gildar met Los Angeles-based art dealer Charlie James, whose eponymous gallery has likewise garnered many kudos. The two clicked, and Gildar instantly hatched the idea of having James, who used to live in Denver, curate a show at the Gildar Gallery with the result aptly titled "Takeover." For the exhibit, James, tapping artists from his stable, explores ideas about power. In Ramiro Gomez's altered found photos, for instance, domestic workers are inserted into the images of luxurious residences that they help to maintain. The point is clear—the people who keep these places pristine are typically out of the picture—literally. A similar idea is promoted in the subtly altered book-covers by Daniela Comani in which literary classics have had their titles changed to flip the sexes of the characters. For example, there's *Lord Chatterley's Lover* and *The Little Princess*. Comani crafts the bogus covers brilliantly, so the gag works over and over. Similarly, Jim Thompson convincingly reproduces baseball cards using oil on canvas for *64 Paintings from 1977*. It might be a stretch to see baseball players in some kind of power relationship but the piece is brilliant anyway.

Some of the works trade on traditional concepts of beauty, but undermine it. There's Sandow Birk's *ADX Florence*, which looks like a 19th-century Western landscape until you notice the maximum security prison in the mid-ground. Carol Selter's photos of birds in nature seem lyrical—except that the birds are apparently dead. Other artists James brought in include Ben Jackel, William Powhida and Erika Rothenberg. But James also included an artist that Gildar suggested—Adam Milner.

"TORSOS," ONGOING, 2012 – PRESENT

Adam Milner

UNALTERED PROFILE PIX FROM IPHONE SOCIAL
MEDIA APPS DIGITALLY PRINTED
AND MOUNTED TO CARD STOCK
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE

PHOTO: COURTESY GILDAR GALLERY

For his piece, *Torsos*, Milner likewise explores beauty by using erotic screen shots from m4m iPhone apps printed on photo paper. The men in the photos reveal their bare chests but have taken the selfies so that their faces are hidden. An ongoing project, there are more than a thousand separate images at Gildar, but the entire piece is actually twice as big.

In an ancillary show that Gildar put together, Colorado conceptualists are featured, notably Phil Bender, who's been creating work by assembling found objects for 30 years. Here he's lined up a grid of Zig-Zag rolling-paper packages, which has a special resonance in pot-friendly Denver.

—MICHAEL PAGLIA

HOUSTON

Alfredo Scaroina: "Reclaimed Matter" at Deborah Colton Gallery

Alfredo Scaroina explores the influence of everyday events, personal experiences, contemporary culture, and the creative process on his paintings. This Dominican-born painter, a modernist in style, embraces experimental techniques and fresh ideas in his work in order to express a universal consciousness. His creative process begins when he staples a blank canvas to the studio wall and starts a dialogue with it. As he applies layers of paint and other materials to the surface, the painting undergoes numerous transformations before it is complete. The result is an accumulation of layers of oil, acrylic, gesso, encaustic, spray paint, oil stick, charcoal, graphite, as well as other materials such as recycled fabrics and papers, wood, rope, and even dirt. "I will reuse any materials

