

'Frieze' as sublime as a cool breeze

Deering pulls Boston artists into forefront

By Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent | August 10, 2006

Jane Deering, the peripatetic art dealer, is back in Massachusetts. Deering spends her springs and falls in England, her winters in Santa Barbara, and her summers here. Up until this summer, she's mounted rich but crowded exhibitions in her Gloucester home. She's showing there this year, too, but she's also descended upon Boston, renting space on Harrison Avenue in the busiest gallery building during the slowest gallery season of the year.

Deering loves Boston artists. She specializes in burrowing into the local scene and pulling out jewels. "Summer Frieze: Other Visions + Other Strategies" features a slew of rigorous works that have little to do with each other, save a cool palette. Despite the jumble of themes and styles, it's a discerning and smart exhibit.

Youngsuk Suh shoots gorgeous minimalist photographs of empty interiors in natural light. Two images here of a condo in Milton capture the spectrum from blinding white to inky black. The lights and shadows seep organically across the sparse geometry of the empty rooms, creating lush textures and unexpected colors, as if the condo is Suh's canvas and sunlight his paint.

Another photographer, Esther Pullman, takes greenhouse interiors as her subject, presenting them in lovely, magical triptychs, changing up the perspective so the viewer feels like a passenger on a train that's switching tracks. "Private Estate Greenhouse, Wellesley" has a smattering of blossoms on the floor, but the focus is on the architecture, all the angles and planes of fogged-up glass, which Pullman elucidates with her triptych form.

Shelley Reed, who last year won the Museum of Fine Arts Maud Morgan Prize, which is awarded to a local female artist in midcareer, shows up here with stark, startling paintings of birds in her trademark black-and-white palette. Reed excerpts scenes from art history; in "Rooster (after Hondecoeter)" she borrows a nervous cock from the Dutch baroque painter Melchior d'Hondecoeter. It's a subtle, velvety portrait of a bird that looks like it's about to alert everyone that the sky is, indeed, falling.

Another bird, painted with the spare strokes of a calligrapher and a soft wash of ink on paper, appears in Robin Paine's "Marabou Stork, opening wings." The branch and the stork's long, knobby legs are all spindly and precarious, yet there's a splendid grace to the heft of its body and the arc of its wings.

Painter Sue Trent offers a wry group of four portraits. ``Mona" and ``Marilyn" are two of history's most famously portrayed women -- the Mona Lisa and Marilyn Monroe. The blond, twinkling Marilyn is all flirtation, compelling outside attention, whereas Mona looks like her own woman, with an internal life. Two paintings titled ``Grimacing Man" round out the quartet -- eyes squinting, broad jaw clenched, painfully clownish, full of dark energy. The combination of images is both funny and unsettling.

There's more: Deering has effectively fit a lot of work in a small space without creating clutter. Pieces range from the careful, realist ``Painter's Apron," a painting by Colin Kennedy, to the deeply textured abstract ``A Moment of White Sky," made from burnt paper and pigment by Susan Erony, to slabs of encaustic by Dawn Southworth, which could be tablets brought down from the mount written over with a compelling, childlike scrawl.

It's too bad Deering isn't here year-round. At the same time, that would make her shows less intriguing and her attention to Boston-area artists less gratifying than it is.

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