

Gallery Beat

by Lenny Campello



Fruits, as still life subjects, have been the favorites of artists since prehistoric people painted the wondrous cave walls of Spain and France, and they remain one of the most common subjects for beginning and established artists alike. Joe Shannon, one of the best painters in the DC area and a former curator at the Hirshhorn Museum, delights in telling the story of the magical moment when, as a child in Puerto Rico, his mother taught him how to put a dab of white highlight on a painting of an apple and turn a flat image of a fruit into a three dimensional marvel.

At the Principle Gallery on King Street, another Puerto Rican artist, Jose Luis Mendez, has some exceptional paintings of this common subject, but elevated to that sublime realm of art that only the gifted brush of a talented artist can create. His colors are vibrant and deftly applied in decisive strokes that magnify the power of oil paint to add that sheen and hue that translates as ripeness in fruit, and which photography can never properly record or duplicate. There is a little bit of Sargent and Velasquez in his brushwork, but a lot of Mendez comes through in these exceptional works, easily some of the best I've seen in this genre. Also showing at Principle are the paintings of Jessie Stuart Mackay, but the somber double Scottish name has nothing to do with the sunny paintings delivered by this artist. Again, free brushwork and a complete mastery of the relationship between colors yield some superb work. According to gallery director Sue Hogan, Mackay is one of their best-selling artists, and about fourteen pieces remain of sixty initially displayed during the exhibition. The Principle Gallery does about nine major shows a year, each usually lasting for about two weeks.



"Daylight Pears" by Chris Krupinski at The Art League



"Wednesday's Child" two views by Jackie Saunders at The Art League

At the Art League, the All-Media Membership show was juried by Prof. Timothy App, from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore. App selected 130 pieces from 537 entries, and as usual with the Art League shows, there are some outstanding pieces as well as some weak ones, but overall it remains a very strong group show. In my opinion, the best piece in the show could either be Chris Krupinski's "Daylight Pears" (her mastery over watercolors never ceases to amaze me) or Scott Hutchison's "Her Former Self," but I also liked Jackie Saunderson's "Wednesday's Child" quite a lot. Saunders displays that ease of being able to capture the human figure with a minimum of lines and colors. This is a skill that seems so easy to the untrained eye, but is in reality one of the most difficult challenges faced by any artist.

Scott Hutchison's entry stands apart from every other painting in the show like a rabbit punch to the visual senses. His is a strange world of people and machines that sometimes cross identities and visual borders. In this tungsten-colored world, he brings forth "Her Former Self." Is it a machine or a woman? almost bored to satisfaction from eating her own body parts - screws, nails, mechanical parts. It is a memorable painting by one of Washington's most talented young painters.

Down the hall from the Art League, the Target Gallery has a sculpture and drawing exhibition by French artist Ivan Messac, co-sponsored by the French Embassy. The sculptures are either made of fabric and foam shaped into rough ball shapes or wall sculptures of black shoe polish on cardboard. Although this is overall a very weak show (the drawings, paper cut-outs and wall sculptures are forgettable at best), there's a somewhat attractive visual interest in the nine sets of fabric sculptures in the gallery display arrangement.

Upstairs at Factory Photoworks Gallery, James D. Steele and Grace Taylor share the gallery walls for some exceptional photography by these two masters. Taylor's work focuses on Central American and Mexican children and manages to capture the ancient elegance and bearing of these last descendants of the native peoples of those lands. Steele's imagery de-

lights the erotic senses as he flexes his photographic skills with a flawless model enveloped in a mist-like cloth. He plays with these Selenium-toned images to offer multiple views of what a darkroom master can accomplish with a camera, a darkroom and a beautiful woman.

Finally, Gallery West has their five new members on exhibition, but only two truly stand out: Nancy Hannans and George Skorupski. Hannans paintings are almost iconic and somewhat obsessive in nature. Her "Saint Georgina" is a powerful female warrior spearing the helpless (and somewhat odd looking) dragon. I quite liked her work and the honesty in all of her pieces. Skorupski works in turned wood, and although nearly all of his pieces are very simple and straightforward, it is in this simplicity that their attractiveness and skill lie.



Sculpture by Ivan Messac at the Target Gallery



"Sheer Magic" by James D. Steele at Factory Photoworks



"Tejedora con su Hijo" by Grace Taylor at Factory Photoworks