

Small Vistas

The 10-year show at 100 Pearl.

By Patricia Rosoff

Ten Years at 100 Pearl

100 Pearl Street Gallery, Hartford,
(860) 233-1932
Through Aug. 7

The 10th anniversary exhibit at 100 Pearl Street Gallery celebrates Janice LaMotta's tenure as curator of exhibitions in this space by framing (literally) a jewel-like sampling of the artists she has featured here over the decade. This show bears the thumbprint of her curatorial touch (an emphasis on enriching physical craft and subtle visual effects) and the nature of her sense of staging (small-scale works sensitively orchestrated).

Fifty-five artists are on exhibit, winnowed from over 400 artists that have been shown in this space since 1994. The names of the majority of these artists should be very familiar to Hartford gallery-goers — these are many of the most accomplished figures in the state, regional and in some cases national art scene.

What is almost always interesting about a show by LaMotta is the issue of scale — in this case, inviting the viewer to step within breathing distance illuminates the technical sensuality of the images she presents.

Move close, for instance, to the seemingly simple blue geometric abstraction by Chet Kempczynski (a tiny page that is formatted like notebook-ruled writing paper), and one discovers the delicate, thready fire of red and orange that leaks out of the cracks between opaque blue shapes. In such a work one learns that there's an amazing amount of heat that can be generated in the irritable dynamism between color and shape, separation and adjacency.

A similar demonstration of visual tension is elicited by Deborah Muirhead's tiny yellowed image which contains little else than a sketchy rendition of a few tangled strands of string tossed down on one side of an otherwise pregnant field of ... nothing. Created by taking a greasy china marker to transparent mylar — its effects so like a pencil sketch on beat-up parchment — this fantasy of aged effects folds you in the runic mysteries of its meandering.

Artists I have seen a hundred times deliver a surprising punch at this scale and in this company. Terry Donsen Feder, for one, delivers two small land-

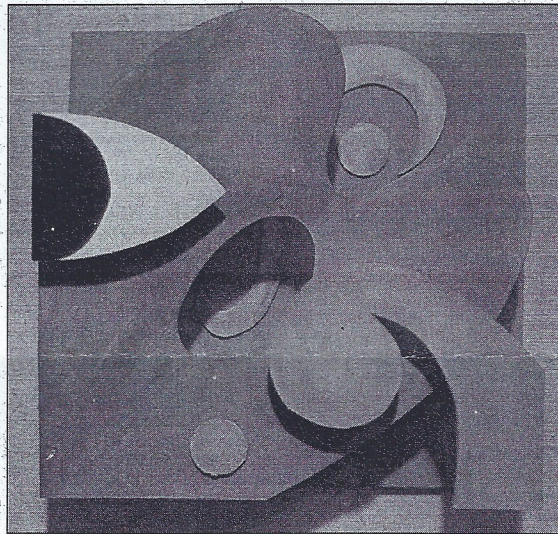


PHOTO COURTESY 100 PEARL

Untitled mixed-media collage by Francine Gintoff.

scape scenes on aluminum panels. The surrounding glint of dull metal serves as a perfect foil for the jewel-like brilliance of her little "window on the world" (how is it that a metal "canvas" stirs oil color to such ecstasies?).

Likewise, John Ford comes up with special electricity at this scale in his lovely seascape called "Vista." The compression of forms and delicacy of handling in this little painting, coupled with the suggestive "leaks" of a blanket of red underpainting make this picture, for all its simplicity, an especially rich little masterpiece.

Sally Given, too, in a cunning collage titled "Mattinuck" builds an architectural view clapboard by clapboard. The skill of her illusionism, which from a distance would seem merely realistic, is deliciously offset by the simple fact that she built this little picture out of thicknesses of colored paper.

Joy Floyd, too, who works in collage — patching together wonderful little compositions out of wear-worn snippets of clothing, bits of crumpled paper and scraps of rusted metal — tucks all her magic into this tiny framework with all the grace of a calico cat. Abstract composition doesn't get much better than Floyd's.

Playfulness interjects itself in this exhibit's progressive story: Lucy Sand

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Seery gives us a cheeky Polaroid transfer titled "Sitting Duck #28," proffering her signature yellow rubber ducky on an eensy beensy throne.

Photographer Roger Crossgrove offers one a beautifully complex, hauntingly sexualized photographic "still life" — a color photo that features pears and slide-projected ones set into an accordion-pleated setting. The effect is at once dreamy and surreal, funny and sensuous, beautifully composed and thoroughly strange.

More than anything else that defines this array of works — and LaMotta's tenure as curator of this space — it is the insistence on a dialogue between medium and subject, between what a thing is and what it can mean. ■