

Strange Times

Of all the shows and events that our very own ATHICA hosts, I feel I can say with certainty that the annual ATHICA Emerges series is among my favorites. This is the one time a year when Director Lizzie Zucker Saltz and a guest curator compile consistently handsome exhibitions *exclusively* from local and regional artist applications. Featuring a sprawling sculptural and video installation by West Georgia artist **Casey McGuire**, acrylic paintings by **Patrick Triggs**, cut-paper works by **Melissa Dickenson** and print-based assemblages by **Jon Swindler**, **ATHICA Emerges: "Uncertainty"** seeks to encapsulate our increasingly uncertain times (ecologically, financially, spiritually, etc.) through a varied collection of works. It's a tall order, no question, and one that may be ultimately difficult to name through a presentation of art objects, but the show raises some interesting issues and makes for a great viewing.

Upon entering the gallery, one is immediately confronted with **Casey McGuire's** "Diving Through Surface Into Light," a huge multimedia work that essentially creates its own environment. McGuire's interest in the combining of disparate materials is on full display in this piece, which incorporates (among other things) a found dollhouse, used furniture and a softly undulating ocean of television screens. Culled from the discarded domestic materials of the many foreclosed homes in her Carrollton, GA neighborhood, "Diving Through Surface..." is McGuire's meditation on the mortgage crisis and subsequent recession that, as anyone familiar with small rural towns knows, hit hardest at the bottom. The artist isn't one to force her materials into a constructed narrative—rather, McGuire prefers to preserve her found objects as they are, forming meaning through pre-conceived arrangements; the effect is vaguely haunting: as we move through the piece, we somehow feel complicit in its statements.

That the remainder of the work in the show was selected based upon McGuire's installation should come as no surprise. "Diving Through Surface..." sets a tone for the other quieter works, which tuck themselves behind McGuire's expanse; the quietest of which being **Melissa Dickenson's** "Cut Paper Series." Each piece is pinned directly to the wall, as delicate as any preserved flower specimen, although Dickenson's intentions with her paper constructions are not quite what they seem. Originally commissioned by the Embassy of Sudan, each of Dickenson's flowers references the hibiscus, a major cash crop for the Sudanese people, and the violence that hibiscus farmers open themselves to on a daily basis. I myself was particularly drawn to "Grenade," which simultaneously resembles its namesake, as well as a heavy bud, swollen, overripe, ready to burst. The reality that processes of nature are composed of as much violence as our own international relations and commerce is not exactly news—but artists don't break news, they give insights. Dickenson's handsomely crafted paper works extend this reality on their own gorgeous terms—they're worth spending some time with.

The subtlety of **Patrick Triggs'** abstract paintings is not to be underestimated either. Full disclosure? It's my opinion that the last 15 or so years have established a dearth of language for discussing, understanding and thoroughly appreciating abstraction in the contemporary world of art—but alternatively, abstraction is by its very nature an elusion of the immediate and of the spoken (re: an embracing of the uncertain). These paintings, as inauspicious and diaphanous as they initially appear, visually require a position of absolute fortitude. Against blank expanses of white or raw canvas, Triggs' forms struggle, sustain, mutate and change into (or out of) one another. It would be perfectly reasonable to suggest they allude to the efforts of a community to depend upon one another in uncertain times, but altogether provocative to understand them as communities *unto themselves* existing independently of one another. When they're collected in groupings on the wall, a viewer begins to imagine connections between the pieces, but it's important to remember that these connections are, in the end, only imagined. Triggs' work is complex in its apparent simplicity, and although still developing, it's a quietly thrilling ride worth waiting for.



Abstract painting by Patrick Triggs

UGA printmaking professor **Jon Swindler** recently altered his studio practice dramatically, excluding all potentially toxic substances from the production of his work. The result is a healthy and green working environment characterized by a higher-than-usual number of misprints, misfires and mistakes in the printing process. To the amateur (like, oh, myself for example) this would be infuriating, but to Swindler, whose work frequently employs every last scrap of a rigorous process, it becomes an occasion for invention. "The Unfortunate Nature of Lithography" creates low-relief wall assemblages from framed "misprints" collected during routine printing sessions—backing sheets, snap prints and over-inked runs all stacked in frames upon one another to create minimalist sculptural forms as repetitive and alluring as the lithographic process itself. If this sounds like a bunch of geeky jargon, it totally is: but I promise, the work is much better in person.

ATHICA Emerges: "Uncertainty" is on display until July 25. Get out of the heat and check out some of the local talent.