

ARTS & LIVING

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Five artists make their points known

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Arts & Living Editor

KINGSTON — It would be easy to call "Imprints, Punctures & Other Pointed Maneuverings," the latest Main Gallery exhibition at the University of Rhode Island, interesting exercises in deconstruction, since all of the works consciously disrupt traditional notions of painting, sculpture and printmaking.

But that's missing the point it seems, in a show that succeeds in

getting the viewer to look at objects differently. A simple idea can be deceptively complex. Take fingerprints. They are familiar patterns, unique to each of us, representing stamps of individuality. Artist Merle Temkin uses these personal patterns of her own fingerprints in works of mixed media, which expand upon the theme. Her fingerprints leave a mark entirely her own and, through her art, are in fact made by her own

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hand. Temkin's "Finger," "Heel" and "Toe" are created from drilled Arches paper. They suggest a kind of Braille — yet another variation on seeing. The patterns are organic, informing the viewer not only of skin prints but also of imagery that might be witnessed by satellites pointing to Earth or a scientist studying a slide under a microscope, revealing through a human's touch our universal links to the micro-

and macro worlds.

In other works combining needlework and paint on cloth or cotton, Temkin defies tradition and exposes elements of a medium that are usually hidden. Negative becomes positive, back becomes front. Hanging threads, instead of dangling behind the image, away from the view, are now front and center. The threads create a new way of looking at needlework, giving power to works

Traditional/C2

Traditional media evolve in new exhibition

From C1

like "Hairy," "Scratched" and "Mayday." By showing the part of an artwork that isn't supposed to be seen, Temkin reminds us that art is always more than meets the eye.

The sweep and stroke in Irene Lawrence's series of "anti-paintings," "Motives for Writing," create pattern from chaos. These oil on canvas and oil on linen works are unsettling to the eye, forcing it to look at the surface and beyond, from mark to mark. Taken individually or as a series, these images present a frenetic, disturbing vision, full of broken lines and multidirectional layers, with no fixed sense of place. They are eternally moving, searching, breaking apart and re-forming. By extension (adding to the prick of discomfort we feel), so are we.

Dave Cole's two whimsical pieces occupy one corner of the gallery. His "Electric Blanket" represents 900 feet of contractors' cords knitted to queen size. The resulting blanket, coiled to a symmetrical weave, with two strands dangling, is both surreal and familiar. The cord that provides power has been transformed into an object that suggests heat.

"Four Foot Knitting Needles,"

Cole's other piece, stands ridiculously in the corner, leaning against the wall casually as if left there by some seamstress from the "Land of the Giants." Handcrafted from yellow birch and white pine, the piece again demonstrates a satiric and surreal point of view in merging the natural — energy in the case of "Electric Blanket," the woods in "Knitting Needles" — with the domestic.

Four works in Fran Siegel's "Interference" series line one of the gallery walls. Alternately mixing some combination of oil and acrylic on steel mesh and plexiglass, these works echo Temkin's fingerprints in their fascination with negative and positive interaction, subtly shifting in color from silver and red to silver and green to silver and blue. Three of the pieces are dominated by multiple puncture marks that play with intricate patterns, delicate colors and a tension between light and dark. "Interference #12" complements the other three, except that the pinpricks give way to coin shapes on mirrored plexiglass, creating a cool counterpoint to Temkin's more volatile renderings. The artist's fingerprints, or signature in this case, are revealed in layers and degrees through punctured steel mesh, like phases between life experi-

ences.

Another Siegel work, a delightful installation that has cast plaster versions of seashells on the floor and climbing the walls in one corner of the gallery, continues the organic dynamic begun by "Interference." The shell's spirals echo patterns in the wall hangings. Subtle colors glow from behind the shells, hinting at the life within. Like Cole's "Knitting Needles" in the opposite corner, the installation also redefines the concept of traditional gallery space, forcing one's eye to abandon the familiar view of a room's four contained walls for a new vision. Down is up, in is out, and walls and floors are just planes in space.

Jean Blackburn's deconstructed, reconstructed and partially constructed sculptures of objects found in the home are the most obviously subversive pieces in the show, bringing new energy and insight to household familiars. A former dresser becomes the sculpture, "Collector." It's half-painted in robin's-egg blue and white, half-unpainted, with some drawers open, others closed, some stuck, others missing, some with no bottoms. The sculpture has a childlike, fairy-tale, gingerbread quality. It is both antique and in-progress, and timeless in

the sense that the viewer doesn't know whether the dresser, in its current state, has been abandoned or is being worked on.

In "Between," a sculpture involving a crib, bed frame, wood and paint, the object has even more intimacy, once again evoking childhood as well as the place where we spend a third of our lives. It, too, is incomplete, either half realized or half destroyed, revealing what's missing as much as what's made. Again, the theme is transition, the place "between" now and before, now and next — just as sleep falls between our waking lives, and nights between days; crib comes between womb and bed, which itself comes between crib and coffin.

"Empty/Full," a maple table, completes Blackburn's trilogy of domestic objects refinished to look unfinished, giving us a fresh perspective on the mundane. Again, in this moment of clarity, the truth of the object is in the eye of the beholder. The certainty of whether it is empty or full, finished or not, useful or ruined cannot be found on the table itself. The answer lies within us.

"Imprints, Punctures & Other Pointed Maneuverings" will run through Friday, March 8.