

A companion show for Women's History Month



Kim Banister's "Kneeling Figure" is part of the exhibit "Visionary Women, the Journey: Art About Women by Women" at Columbia Art Center through March 31. (/ HANDOUT)

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Artists are among those who are calling attention to March as Women's History Month. An exhibit at the Columbia Art Center, "Visionary Women, the Journey: Art About Women by Women," is also a stylistic journey encompassing everything from realism to abstraction.

The juror for this exhibit was Robin Holliday, owner of HorseSpirit Arts Gallery in Savage Mill. Her eclectic selections generally have in common an inspirational quality

That being the case, you can expect to see a good number of realistic portraits in which the subjects proudly meet the viewer's gaze.

Roslyn Zinner, for instance, has two mosaics, "Harriet Tubman" and "Rachel Maddow," in which the tightly cropped compositions mean you are face to face with these women. The Tubman mosaic incorporates the brief texts "If you want to taste freedom, keep going" and "If you are tired, keep going." Regardless of whether Tubman eventually ends up having her face on a 20 dollar bill, you can appreciate the determined face she presents to the world here.

Also by way of inspiration, April Rimpo's acrylic painting "Gentle Wisdom" features an unnamed elderly woman whose white hair amounts to a testament to a long life. The background for this portrait is just a brown-hued painterly zone with some drips running down from it. Although you may find yourself looking for awhile at that abstracted backdrop, it's so thematically neutral that your attention inevitably returns to the woman's face in the foreground.

Another elderly subject is also featured in Joyce Lister's pastel "Zeb." We don't know this particular individual's life story, of course, but the portrait itself conveys a sense of somebody with a lot of life experience and the confidence accrued from it.

At the opposite end of the age spectrum, Julie Neidorf's watercolor "My Beautiful Brave New World" presents a young woman whose slightly upturned face and gentle smile give a sense of somebody who is hopeful in terms of whatever lies ahead in life.

Also self-confident and calm are the two female faces depicted in LaToya Hobbs' woodcut "Marci." This is such a large-scale print that much of the composition is devoted to swirling circular patterns that surround the faces like a force field; and because the artist is working in black-and-white here, that energized field simultaneously has an austere tone.

The above-mentioned artworks emphasize the human face, but nude female models are the subject for works including two linseed oil wash paintings by Kim Banister, "Kneeling Figure" and "Crouching Figure." The outlined female forms are colored in with earth-toned shades that give a sense of how skin often has varied tones rather than being entirely monochromatic. The artist also has areas of blue and red paint running down and around the female figures. Such an overtly painterly approach calls your attention to the fact that these are representations of women and also, of course, works of art dealing with esthetic issues of form and color.

Although the portraits and other realistic depictions of women typically communicate a self-assured mood, a few works in the exhibit indicate some of the more troubling concerns that women face.

This is most prominently the case with Fariba Ghisor's pastel "Rebellious 4." It's a portrait of a woman in which the top half of her head is totally

concealed by a veil. Even though the bottom half of her face can be seen, there is a piece of tape across her mouth. As this pastel portrait reminds us, women in many parts of the world still confront significant restrictions on their self-expression.

Dealing with equally serious concerns in a more obliquely metaphoric way is Susan Stockman. Her sculptural assemblage “Flight of the Fractured Goddess” was made out of materials including woven copper, ceramics and shells. It’s a winged figure in which the central figure itself is so completely broken that it’s barely recognizable as a figure either human or mythic. This figure presumably could still fly through your imagination, but it seems like it would be a rough journey.

The stylistic diversity within this exhibit means that the artworks that are realistic or that at least make references to the human form are accompanied by other artworks that are completely abstract.

Diana Ulman’s acrylic painting “Waterfall” mostly consists of vertical white brush strokes that evoke the force of a waterfall; and Stacey Berger’s acrylic painting “Midnight Island” has midnight-blue zones of color that seem like an island within a green-and-aqua sea.

The expressiveness of these and other abstract works in the exhibit implicitly speak to female artists expressing themselves by pushing the paint around.

“Visionary Women, the Journey: Art About Women by Women” runs through March 31 at the Columbia Art Center, 6100 Foreland Garth in

Long Reach Village Center in Columbia. Call 410-730-0075 or go to Art.Staff@ColumbiaAssociation.org

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