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artscope

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PATRICK O'DONNELL'S ABSTRACT
HUMOR AT ZEPHYR

CELEBRATING NEW ENGLAND MASTERS: VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN
| DEBRA CLAFFEY | DAVID A. LANG | ELIZABETH MACDONALD |
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SPRING CELEBRATION AT MILL BROOK | STATE OF CLAY IN
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WE'RE GOING TO ART BASEL SWITZERLAND

May/June 2016

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DIVERSE STATES OF EXISTENCE

INSTINCTIVE FORMATIONS AT SHATTUCK

Midway through April and in anticipation of an exhibition at the Dedee Shattuck Gallery in Westport, Mass. that would not open until June, I visited the studio of Rebecca Hutchinson in bucolic Rochester, Mass., just north of New Bedford. Hutchinson, who has been a professor of ceramics at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth since 2001,

as singular sculptures or as structures formulated as components of large, site-specific installations.

Her work is largely botanical in appearance, and Hutchinson noted that “there are diverse states of existence” that she continues to observe and study, including the structure of nature, the interaction of various and competing forces of nature, biological diversity, and the resilience of life itself manifested as the struggle to grow, expand, reproduce and nurture.

There is a common tendency to create great divides between big disciplines such as art and science. But Hutchinson is having none of that. As the daughter of scientists, she has a raging curiosity and a learned point of view. Her sculptures are the result of careful observation, informed decisions and a meticulous handling of materials. She digs into the muck, both figuratively and literally, physically and spiritually embracing nature as her muse.

In works collectively called the “Determinate Growth” series, she takes inspiration from root systems, rock outcroppings,

moss, the forest floor, invasive species and the species that fight against them, the strength and fragility of small- and large-scale ecosystems, floral beauty and ferocity, and plant formations of all kinds. The work is highly detailed with great respect for the traditions of the crafts that make up the sum of her whole, but it is a respect

that is not overly pious. She noted the influence of Persian rugs and Islamic pattern-making for example, but she is not burdened by a tendency toward decoration and unnecessary flourishes.

The sculptures, some of which sit on the floor and some that are suspended from the wall, are made primarily from a few elements. There is, of course, clay, some “site dug,” some purchased. There are fibrous florets of handmade paper, made pink or powder blue or delicate green by the addition of repurposed old clothing, rags or table linens added to the pulp in the papermaking process. They are tatterdemalions transformed into something that manages to be both earthbound and ethereal.

Sometimes, the pulp is made from harvested garden materials (Hutchinson grows much of her family's food) or from industrial surplus goods, such as sisal hemp, used in the manufacture of burlap bags, rope and rugs.

Hutchinson constructs the sculptures by combining the clay and paper elements in such a manner that they seem to have always coexisted. The individual components are brought together in a composite harmony with the application of a mixture of paper pulp and clay, seemingly as thick as peanut butter, which acts as a near-indestructible bonding agent as it hardens.

Her “Orange Burst” is a wall hanging that appears oh-so delicate but, like nature itself, looks can belie the truth. It is an elegant work of peach tones, pale yellow and lavender harnessed into funnel-like shapes and carnations. There are elements of floral sensuality to rival Georgia O’Keefe. “Green Bloom” is quieter and cooler, rich with periwinkle blue, ecru and faded viridian. Both works balance hard against soft and glossy against matte, while harnessed against a trellis of willow, again harvested by the artist.

DEEDE SHATTUCK
GALLERY
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THROUGH 26



Rebecca Hutchinson, *Orange Burst*, 2016, porcelain, clay, handmade paper, natural material, 47" x 27" x 15" (photo by Richard Gorn)

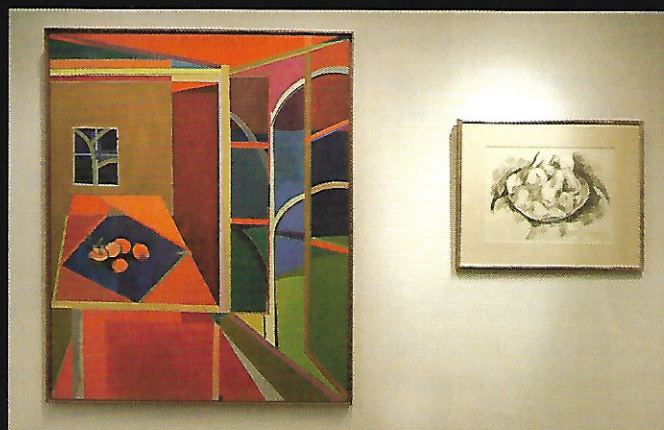
has a multifaceted workspace including a small and simple woodshop, printmaking studio and papermaking gear, as well as kilns and ceramics production equipment.

And clearly she uses it all, sometimes as the tools of a solitary craft, but more often combining the elements of the various disciplines to create complex and ornate three-dimensional works deployed

BERTA WALKER GALLERY



Varujan Boghosian, *Breakthrough*, mixed media construction



Jim Forsberg (1919-1991), painting & Marsden Hartley (1877-1943), lithograph



Marsden Hartley (1877-1943) & Penelope Jencks

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Salient terms come to mind, such as “bloom dynamics,” defined as “the ability of botanical forms to grow despite boundaries to the point in which additional growth is accommodated and separate individual structures appear to be unified from the graceful growth patterns” and “ecophysiology,” the “biological discipline that studies the adaptation of an organism’s physiology to environmental conditions.” (Thanks, Wikipedia!) What Hutchinson has so adeptly managed to do with her elaborate and interconnected sculptures and installations is get the viewer to understand what this all means. It is a wonderful example of “showing, not telling,” and works not only as a symbol for the necessary and vital dynamic interwovenness of nature, but also as a metaphor for society.

Hutchinson’s work will be but half of “Instinctive Formations,” organized by the Dedee Shattuck Gallery’s lead curator Jodi Stevens. She will co-exhibit with sculptor and multidisciplinary artist Michael Kukla.

As Kukla maintains a studio in New Jersey and spends significant time in France, a quick jaunt to his atelier was out of the question. But by researching his work, it seems an engagingly perfect complement to Hutchinson’s. In an artist statement, Kukla notes that prior to becoming involved in art-making, he studied geology. His love of rocky formations, and his intimacy with the solidity of stone transformed by the fluidity of water to create cavities, caves and crevasses, are his building blocks. From that, he creates fascinating sculptures reminiscent of webs, honeycombs and cellular structures.

Both artists seem to derive solid inspiration from a never-ending source.

| Don Wilkinson



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