



Artists navigate our place in the landscape

Traditional views challenged in UTSA exhibition

By **Steve Bennett** | June 9, 2015 | Updated: June 9, 2015 4:31pm

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Photo: Courtesy Photo

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Michele Monseau explores the seascape in a video in “Elemental ’Scapes” at UTSA.

“Elemental ’Scapes,” a new exhibition at the University of Texas at San Antonio Art Gallery, challenges the traditional view of landscapes, seascapes, even “airscales” such as clouds and wind.

“It’s about how we think about these different kinds of ’scapes,” said gallery director Scott Sherer, who curated the show with Marissa Del Toro. “It’s about how we record them and represent them. Obviously, this is not bluebonnets in the fields.”

“Elemental ’Scapes” features the work of six artists, most from Texas.

California artist Sara Frantz uses vibrant colors on images of buildings to explore the relationship between architecture and landscape.

Dallas artist Ted Kincaid's beautiful digital photographs use images of clouds to ask if what we see is real or fantasy.

San Antonio artist Benjamin McVey's video and drawings are based on proxemics, a study of the way we recognize and use space — as when we say someone is invading our space.



“I’m really into space — not outer space, but physical space and the way we use it,” McVey said.

Using the hexagon as his primary shape, McVey confronts what he calls “the fracturing of our environments.”

“I’m interested in how digital and social media has intruded into our lives,” he said. “In digital space, we don’t have that privacy anymore. It’s about the fracturing of our

environments.”

Michele Monseau, also from San Antonio, has created short videos multilayered with imagery of the desert and the gulf. Human figures recline in the foreground of crashing waves and shifting views of cactus and mesquite.

“I like the horizontal cinematic format,” she said. “I look at these as cinematic landscapes, dramatic fictionalizations.”

Monseau’s video rocks and pitches as if she were standing on a boat with her camera.

“There is a monumentality to the landscape, and I like to destabilize the horizon,” she said. “It relates to how I feel the environment has been destabilized due to climate change and things like that.”

And that silent figure at the center of the video represents our voicelessness and seeming helplessness in the face of polluting forces, she said.

Monseau’s extreme horizontal videos have several layers of imagery — “physical layers, layers of form, layers of meaning,” she said — that draw a viewer in and constantly offer something new for the eye.

“I see them as paintings in that regard,” said Monseau, who earned her master’s degree from UTSA in sculpture.

“I was doing sculpture, but I wanted to animate the work,” she said. “That opened up this whole new world view where I realized I need to use the moving image and integrate it with other media like painting and photography.”

Layers are equally important to Liz

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



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Ward, who is chairwoman of the art department at Trinity University.

She is showing two multimedia vertical works from her “Ghosts of the Old Mississippi” series, which uses geologic maps to track the course of the river over time.

A seventh-generation Louisianan, Ward’s work is nostalgic in that she uses the toile imagery of her grandmother’s wallpaper as well as Huck Finn-like images of river rafts and drawings of migratory birds in these highly dense works on paper.

“This work has a lot of different layers to it,” Ward said. “I started with geologic maps, then I re-read Mark Twain. But it also has a lot of personal history in it, references to my past and my grandmother’s house in New Orleans when I was a kid. It has to do with time, place and memory.”

Finally, maps play a role in Austin artist Bethany Johnson’s intricate line drawings. Sherer said Johnson’s drawings “focus on the visual representation of information, drawing from science, poetry and cartography.”

“Her work explores the unexpected convergences and compatibilities between different systems of interpreting and recording phenomena,” Sherer said.



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