

Writing in Balance

DIVA show blends text with texture.

What is a calligraph? The word origins suggest beauty and writing — both of which do pertain to Tina Schrager's DIVA exhibit, "Calligraphs." Yet this is not about calligraphy. Writing here forms the substrate of complex, multilayered, mixed-media collages characterized by an exquisite balance of elements.

Schrager's initial passion was linguistics. A self-taught artist, she then devoted many years to creating wearable art. Her first works on paper coincided with her move to Eugene, where she also became the Maude Kerns Art Center's exhibit coordinator. She left that position last September in order to devote herself full time to her own art. Although her presence at the Art Center has been missed, her current exhibit amply justifies this decision.

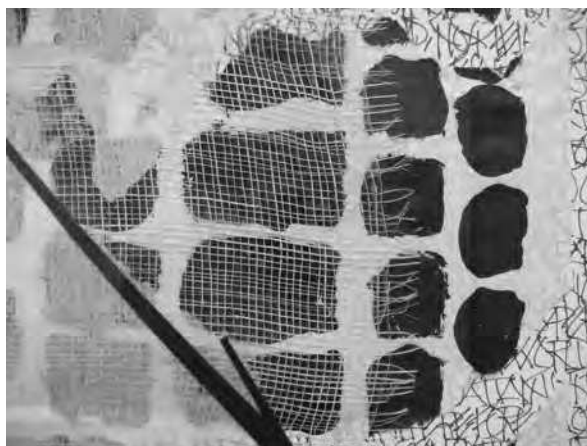
Schrager's work has evolved much since her show at DIVA two years ago. The photographic element, previously central, has almost vanished from her recent pieces, replaced with monotype. Whereas her earlier collages made heavy use of thread for her fiber component, Schrager now works with abaca cloth from the Philippines. Schrager compares abaca, also known as Manila hemp, to the yucca cactus fiber in Mexico. It provides her collages with a lovely, airy texture.

Unchanged from her previous series is the textual fundament that works as a textural layer. Although the handwritten words are not intended to be read, they are meaningful. "The writing is from texts I'm interested in and write down because in doing so, I internalize them in a different way," Schrager says. "Also, forming the letters is itself a pleasure. It's a starting place that gets me in the right frame of mind."

With each subsequent layer, Schrager moves various materials over the collage surface, discarding some, retaining others. Each of these materials — monotypes hand printed on rice paper with barren, fabric,

cut-out papers and aerial photographs — adds its own texture, as do further additions in graphite, pastel, acrylic and stamping from handmade stamps.

This textural richness is offset by the sober palette of soft grays and earth tones added to black and white. Elegance results from the balance of texture, value and weight.



Leverage (detail), mixed-media collage with monotype by Tina Schrager.

Nine x Twelve, Abacus and Moon in a Drop of Dew came first. The *Veil of Maya* series, with a shared element of silk-screened silver rectangles over black or white paper, also belongs to the group of transition pieces. In the more recent pieces, the writing tends to become smaller and monotype makes its appearance.

If *Calligraph* and *Linear B* and *C* have the quality of delicate aerial views of, perhaps, garden complexes and cities, *Seeing Red* and *Linear A* and *D*, with their slight illusion of depth, evoke instead an abstracted architectural landscape.

The *Enso*, Zen symbol and circle of infinity and enlightenment, is a recurrent motif. In the eponymous piece, two perfectly placed intersecting terra-cotta lines suffice to create asymmetrical balance in an otherwise symmetrical composition. Two similar black lines serve the same purpose in *Balance* and *Leverage*.

This is a collection that induces contemplation. "Calligraphs" runs through July 1 at DIVA, 110 W. Broadway. **EW**

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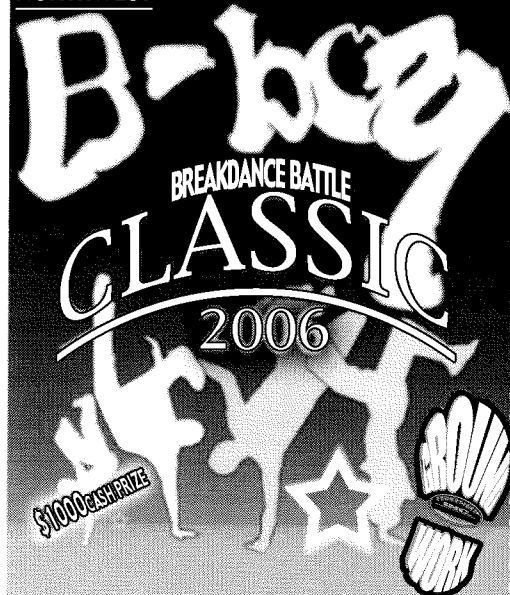
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