

Something for Their Journey

Peril and hope at Maude Kerns

Spirited Journey: Women Artists," currently up at the Maude Kerns Art Center, does not fulfill the promise of its title.

That's a good thing: There's little spiritual "woo-woo" about this muscular group show. Five artists display work ranging from the abstracted solar system in Kathleen Caprario's pieces to the dreamlike and nightmarish layers of Wendy Huhn's textiles, from Annette Gurdjian's compelling paint/photo mash-ups to Betsy Wolfston's elliptical ceramics and Bets Cole's Oregon landscapes. In this gallimaufry, the art creates connections that take time to surface.

The strongest pieces come from Annette Gurdjian, Wendy Huhn and Betsy Wolfston. Gurdjian's strongly colored paintings make references both blatant and subtle and carry compelling messages. *Pan's* Picasso-like head sits atop a body that looks like a photograph of a statue. Gurdjian plays with gender; this Pan wears red lipstick and appears to have breasts. *Tribesmen 2* elicits both giggles and a consideration of the ways screen images can create distance between unfamiliar peoples. Intellect and emotion unite in these works, hung in the small room along with pieces by Wendy Huhn.

Huhn's mixed-media textiles could occupy the visitor for hours. The allusive appeal of her cartoonish children's figures — a teddy bear, butterflies, brightly colored teapots — slides into the nightmarish and disturbing at second glance. These layered works demand that the viewer look at several different strata both of the art and of human emotions. In *Play* (hung on the stage), childlike animals, Bo Peep's sheep, a clown and Chinese astrological

characters pop out — but on further contemplation, possibly menacing adult shadows hover. *Somnambulist*, in the smaller room, blends a broken Humpty Dumpty and a skeleton lovingly holding a pig with a young child trying to hang on to a teddy bear despite the dangers all around. They're watched by an eerily happy children's Moon — and ignored by a woman who seems unaware of the canker in the rose.

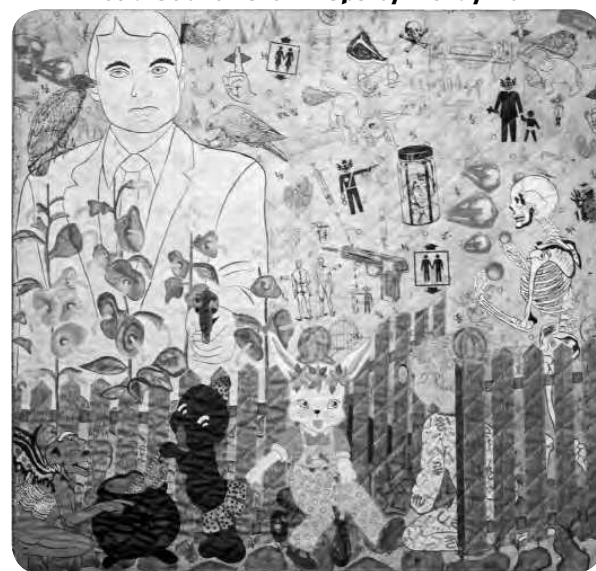
Betsy Wolfston knows the worm as well. Her public art charms those who walk downtown, and her smaller, hanging ceramics grace many a Eugene collection. In this show, though the lovely *Breaking Barriers* and the intense *To the Women in Iraqi Prison* both have appeal, her tour de force piece greets visitors on a small pedestal as they walk in. *If I Could Have Changed Your Pills*: the title with its conditional tense foreshadows the agony, the regret, the wishfulness denied, of this large pillbox. Slip on the provided cotton gloves and open boxes of "AM," "Noon" and "PM" to find small but weighty ceramic "pills," labeled with things like "Hips without pins" and "A visit from your son." This evocative, fine work draws forth strong emotions and, like *Somnambulist*, acknowledges life's promise and pain.

On the east wall of the main room hangs the art of Bets Cole, whose landscapes give witness to her love for the Oregon landscape and plein air painting. Her artist's statement explains her differences with the Impressionists, those most famous of plein air painters. Where Claude Monet captured precise and fleeting instants (for instance, in the *Haystacks* or *Rouen Cathedral* series), Cole writes, "I draw and paint the time, not just the moment in time." This philosophy combines with Cole's layering process so

Somnambulist by Wendy Huhn



Not a Job for Grown-Ups by Wendy Huhn



If I Could Have Changed Your Pills by Betsy Wolfston

that she creates paintings both calm and calming in a blocky, Cezanne-flavored style. *Pacific Coast Town* might be the most relaxing of the group.

Opposite Cole's work are the paintings of Kathleen Caprario. The *Register-Guard's* Bob Keefer once described her art as "cool," but this grouping of more recent work warms with the use of intense color and a focus on astronomy and space. Reading her artist's statement, with its quotes from Teilhard de Chardin and references to J.M.W. Turner, places the viewer in a different space, the internal space of a capacious brain. "Absence is revealed and amplified while presence is obscured," she writes, a theme of her work since the death of her husband, artist James Ulrich, in 2001. But the work itself, like the small *Promise of Evening* and much larger *The Enchantment*, exhibits more light.

Bring curiosity and intellectual rigor as you take a journey along with these artists. *Spirited Journey* hangs at the Maude Kerns Art Center, a quick EmX ride from downtown at 15th and Villard, through March 21. Visit www.mkartcenter.org or call 345-1571 for more info. **EW**

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