

VAN DOREN WAXTER



Schneider exhibit eclectic, bold, original

By Jeffrey Gillespie, July 27, 2018

The Schneider Museum of Art summer exhibition is featuring work of Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez, Douglas Melini and Karla Wozniak.

Friedemann-Sánchez, a Columbian-born artist who works out of studio spaces in New York and Bogeta, operates in a highly complex, labor intensive manner. Her extraordinarily technical and exquisitely detailed collages are made with Tyvek, a type of flashspun high-density polyethylene fiber most typically associated with building and manufacturing processes.

Friedemann-Sánchez — who describes her current body of work at the Schneider as “anchored in feminism,” fused together by North and South American cultural forms- builds her artistic process on ideas of bicultural and transcultural experience. This installation, entitled “Casta Paintings,” shows large and brooding, intensely intricate pieces that use muted color over dark backgrounds, in a style that alludes opaquely to the work of Henri Rosseau and others. A vertical triptych of etched human figures is enhanced with what appear to be masks of the Northwest coast. A large and exceptionally ornate floral piece dominates a far wall of the gallery space, replete with human and animals forms that are intricately woven into its branches.

Friedemann-Sánchez has received numerous awards, including the Smithsonian Artist Fellowship, and has been an artist-in-residence at such revered locales as the Tamarind Institute in New Mexico and Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, New York.

Douglas Melini is a mid-career American artist with a strong penchant for bright color and an academic interest in the history of painting. According to Melini, his paintings explore “both the abstract and pictorial nature of making an image.” His show, titled “When the Moon Hangs on the Wall,” showcases exquisitely rendered paintings in oil and acrylic with vibrant hues and starkly clean lines. The comprehensive and detailed patchwork style is rendered in tiny scraps of painted canvas.

Melini's work is as bold and original as it is compulsive. The level of focus with which Melini has fashioned his paintings is so complex that it is as hypnotic as it is unnerving. In the end, it's clear that Melini — who has shown at Dallas Museum of Art and at MoMA PS1 in Long Island City, NY, among others — is an enormous talent with a fresh approach. The paintings are finished with hand-painted frames also made by the artist.

Karla Wozniak is a young artist whose primary dealer is San Francisco's Gregory Lind Gallery. Her "I Often Dream of Mountains" series — deliriously rendered, large format landscapes and smaller paintings of views from windows — is strong, although the artist still seems to be referring too reverentially to artists of influence, and has not yet fully found her own voice.

The landscapes in particular lean somewhat heavily on the rules of composition espoused by 1920s and 1930s Expressionism. Wozniak attempts to depart those rules by making the paintings more identifiably representational, and that comes off fine, but the pictures ultimately explore areas that have long since been trampled into cliché by the Academy.

The show also featured "Hyperion," the work of Esther Ruiz, which I either missed during my walk through, or saw but don't remember seeing. The Schneider Museum website describes the work as "Inspired by space operas, pop culture, geometry and the setting sun," and says "Ruiz creates objects that operate simultaneously as miniature landscapes from a distant future and actual size sculptures informed by the family of Minimalism."

A sense of bravura permeates this group show, and it's founded in a strong grasp of technique and history. The Schneider Museum of Art has had an interesting exhibition history since its inception, and the space's 2018 summer show is certainly one of the best expositions to date.