Two FotoFocus Shows Not to Miss

Hard to believe, but we’re halfway through October, the main month of the FotoFocus Biennial. (Some FotoFocus-related shows run longer.)

So this weekend is really a great time to get out and see some of the shows — fotosfocusbiennial.org has a full list. Find CityBeat’s full FotoFocus preview here.

Two that I highly recommend, and that I’m afraid might be overlooked because of bigger museum shows, are Emily Hanako Momohara’s Heirloom — at Downtown’s Weston Art Gallery — and David Benjamin Sherry’s Western Romance at a temporary space at 1500 Elm St. in Over-the-Rhine. Momohara’s show is up through Nov. 30 but Sherry’s ends Nov. 1.

Both use color wonderfully to make you focus on objects and/or landscapes close-up — so close-up they have a transporting, transcendent effect if you can spend enough time with them.

Sherry, an L.A. artist recently featured on The New York Times Magazine’s cover, uses color in a psychedelic way, achieving the effect he wants during processing. It gives his Western mountain and desert landscapes a glaze — a “purple haze,” in the case of “Putting Grapes Back on the Vine” — that turns physical geography into a state of mind. There are also in the show black-and-white prints by masters of Western photography — Ansel Adams, Carleton Watkins — to acknowledge Sherry’s debt and also proclaim a change.

Momohara, who taught photography at the Art Academy of Cincinnati but now is relocating to China, is using Heirloom to explore ideas about her Okinawan and Japanese ancestry. These distinctive still photographs and photograph-like videos isolate and deeply contemplate objects related to or inspired by that.

The vertically formatted pieces — like the fantastic “Gathering” video, which looks at luminescent, open-mouthed koi as they crowd around the water’s surface — seem to be moving forward a grand narrative, like scrollwork. And the more horizontal pieces, like “Mask #1,” revel in mystery through the way illuminated objects occupy space in an otherwise dark ground.

To me, these two shows are among FotoFocus’ very best — and I especially hope Momohara returns at some point with something much more extensive.