

“Aperture” at Phyllis Weston Gallery

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by Jane Durrell

The dream-tinged images in Aperture, Phyllis Weston Gallery’s contribution to FotoFocus, come from distinctly individual bodies of work but share an other worldly quality.

Jane Alden Stevens’ series, “Birth & Death,” is composed of large, labor-intensive mono-prints dating from the early to mid-1990s, “a time before digital tools could have made it much easier” she comments in her artist’s statement. Both a 35 mm film camera and a view camera were employed toward the finished products, with the resulting image projected on to Photo Linen, a cotton fabric coated with light-sensitive black and white emulsion. Processed in the same way as any photographic paper, Photo Linen is no longer made, the artist says.

Stevens’ images – a small hand against a large one, peas still in their pod, a distant ocean shore – employ the extensive range of grays available in black and white photography and are comfortably set off in the 41 x 30 inch expanse of each sheet of Photo Linen. Skillful execution enables these works to skirt the inherent sentiment of their subject matter.

Connie Sullivan, like Stevens, adapts technology to her own ends for the individualistic works seen here. Her light boxes, which she calls “Lasergrams,” are 3-D affairs incorporating movement as well as depth. She constructs abstract forms of metal and glass or whatever else is workable and photographs these subjects from different perspectives, using laser light as her light source. The resulting images, in black and white and the innumerable shades between, in their finished state teasingly alter form before one’s eyes. Sullivan calls this series the “Alchemy of Entrancement,” and indeed any one of them can temporarily mesmerize the viewer. They are both restful and exciting, responses not usually linked.

Devin Stoddard brings color to the mix. His large, handsome prints are muted landscapes that sometimes contain the sculptural shapes of disturbing constructions, i.e. nuclear power plants. The composition of each photograph includes one or many paper cranes folded in Japanese origami style. The series project evolved from Stoddard’s original response to a personal loss, adopting the Japanese custom of folding a thousand cranes. The March, 2011 earthquake that brought down a Japanese nuclear power plant brought him a wider vision. “It became clear that this project was intended to address not only personal tragedies and struggles, but global and environmental ones as well,” Stoddard writes in his artist’s statement. The uneasy balance between man-made change and nature’s own evolution has become his subject; the cranes with their shifting symbolism from Japanese legend are enigmatic accents in every work.

Aperture originally was announced as an exhibition of the work of these three artists, but in the rear rooms of the gallery works by Kim Flora and Kent Krugh join them. Flora’s small, unframed paintings have a slight photographic element but also involve oil and wax overwatercolor for misty compositions that frequently involve bridges. They are pleasant and evocative. Krugh makes photographs that seem almost like portraits of individual trees, in black and white. The inclusion of work by these two artists continues rather than interrupts the show’s theme.

Aperture: Shedding light on the photographs of Jane Alden Stevens, Devin Stoddard, and Connie Sullivan continues through October 27 at the Phyllis Weston Gallery, 2005 ½ Madison Road in O’Bryonville. Hours are 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. Tuesday – Saturday.

–Jane Durrell

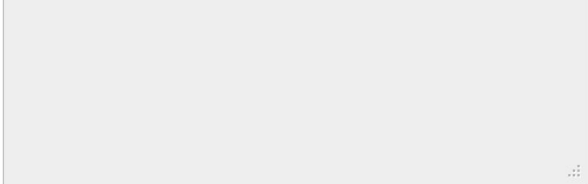


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