

# FOUR SHOWS AT CMCA

Britta Konau - 2013

Center for Maine Contemporary Art

## CLAIRE SEIDL

The Center for Maine Contemporary Art has opened its season with four shows that run the gamut from seriously superb and engagingly smart to superficially hip. In this limited column space, I can unfortunately only make a few remarks about each show.

Starting on CMCA's lower level, Dress Shop pairs paintings by Lesia Sochor with sculptural pieces by Crystal Cawley that center around clothing and headdress as well. Cawley masterfully combines artistic categories (sculpture, textile art, print making, and artists' books) in the service of her vision. In Cawley's series of Thinking Caps, she ingeniously utilizes the qualities of a broad range of papers to boldly reimagine women's historical headgear. The bonnets, caps and hats are expertly made with lots of intricate details that relate to the themes or personalities the pieces pay homage to. A more playful inventiveness pervades the collection of 100 small works of paper in the shape of a traditional dress form that are gathered on two walls. Cawley's paper aprons, on the other hand, appear made for a giantess and don't feature the same degree of intricacy and complexity.

Sochor's contribution of works from her Bodice series is a welcome departure from her paintings of thread spools. Layers of translucent oil paint on sewing patterns create a trompe l'oeil effect of folds, materials and textures. The result is an intriguing physical presence that conflates construction and flesh, cover and content. Both artists' work muses on femininity's indebtedness to tradition.

CMCA's main gallery is occupied by What Was, Is, featuring painter and photographer Claire Seidl and sculptor Duncan Hewitt. The presentation of Seidl's richly layered, gestural paintings is greatly enhanced through juxtaposition with a few of her black-and-white photographs. Formal continuities between the two media include layering of marks and suggestion of dreamlike space. Thematically, mystery pervades both photographs and paintings. More important, though, for this installation may be the suggestion that each body of work is ultimately based on the real world; the paintings just veil their origin a step further. Brimming with pulsating energy, they are

excavations of material proportions at the same time they are accretions of a lifetime's worth of experience.

Hewitt's work is firmly rooted in this world, if only to undermine its apparent mundanity. The care, time and visible handwork the artist lavishes on carving wooden representations of ice skates, the outline of Long Island, what appears to be found scrap metal, and several windshields give them an emotional weight that includes regret and nostalgia. The sculptures are potent reliquaries of the life and time that has passed by the windshields of so many cars. The work of both Seidl and Hewitt is situated along a continuum of the real, which the artists recover in their own personal terms.



THE LIKES OF ME

One side of the loft gallery is occupied by Peter Soriano's wall-based works created on site. Combining spray-painted and stenciled graphic symbols with short lengths of pipe and steel cables, the works defy all categorization and draw their inspiration from graffiti, directional signage, landscapes, industrial design and natural phenomena. This all sounds good, and I always welcome material and conceptual experimentation; however, this installation leaves much to be desired. Only very few pieces successfully interact with their surrounding space. The rest comes across as self-consciously attempting to be hip and urbane. Soriano's visual language is promising but its use has not coalesced enough yet into a convincing vocabulary.

The contrast to Anna Hepler's pieces in the adjacent gallery could not be more forceful and illuminating. Here is a mature artist in whose work everything is seriously and deeply considered. Integrity is the word that comes to mind. Consider the artist-created pedestals that support ceramic forms and beautifully complement their shape, texture, and materiality. Or the transmogrification of one concept into multiple iterations - a hallmark of Hepler's oeuvre. Woodcuts, intaglio prints, ceramics and steel-wire sculptures on display here are related, yet each is perfect and complete in itself. In the hands of a great artist the translation of ideas into physical form becomes an ostensibly natural, organic process, which is certainly true for Hepler. She is the Maine Arts Commission's 2013 Visual Arts Fellow for good reason.