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FLINT, MI

Observations



Bob Campbell

A collection of compositions created for
Buckham Fine Arts Project's Writer in Residence



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A collection of compositions
created by Bob Campbell for
Buckham Fine Arts Project's
Writer in Residence
October 2022 - September 2023.

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Forward

At the core of Buckham Fine Arts Project since 1984 is the guiding principle of providing opportunities for our community to engage with a broad range of innovative contemporary art, both visual and non-visual, of the highest quality and standard. Our vision includes supporting and nurturing artists, building community and inclusivity, while challenging our audience to engage with and look at art in new ways.

The Writer In Residence (WIR) project was launched in early 2021 to unite Buckham's programming with contemporary literary arts and Flint's Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) community. It's an opportunity for literary BIPOC artists from Genesee County to immerse in their appreciation of visual arts by experiencing the exhibits in the gallery. The resident writer produces written components responding to each exhibition. While ensuring representation within its programming, Buckham continues to grow deeper ties within Flint's BIPOC community and provides an opportunity to promote the literary arts of its resident writers.

Each new cycle of the residency is an opportunity for rebirth of the program. The writers and their approach is new, as are the visual artists, artworks, and themes of the shows. There are very few guidelines for the writers: be in the gallery to see and absorb the visual displays, then gather those experiences to feed your own creations in written language. Buckham does not prescribe genre or word counts on their literary expression. We just ask that they are present and open their hearts to the experience. No big deal, right?

During the 2022 - 2023 cycle the resident writer didn't do this once, but 24 times. Some of the shows are concurrent solo artist presentations, while others are themed group shows and a myriad of combinations, amounting to 488 works of visual art by 144 artists. The single consistency is to start again every 4 to 5 weeks. This third cycle of the WIR project was also the biggest yet- challenging the writer to respond to each of 24 shows, not just picking and choosing which shows most appealed to them.

It is my honor and pleasure to share this third publication featuring Bob Campbell, Buckham's 2022 - 2023 Resident Writer. In addition to attending the exhibitions at Buckham Gallery, Campbell became a true member of the Buckham Arts Collective family. He not only created 24 compositions, Campbell was a frequent participant at Buckham events including ARTWALK, Artist Talks, and Cider & Slides. More than all that, Bob became a regular at the gallery and a friend.

I owe my deepest gratitude to Bob Campbell for his hard work and enthusiastic participation in Buckham's Writer In Residence and community. Many thanks to the artists who exhibited with Buckham Gallery and shared their images for inclusion in this book. The artists delve into personal and cultural experiences. I believe the power of art is to create shared experiences and build empathy. Something worth cultivating.

A profound thank you to my colleague Katie Cotton, and to Buckham's Board of Directors, Buckham Arts Collective, and Community Members, whether directly or indirectly your support is appreciated!

We are forever grateful to the individuals who donated to our sponsorship call, helping us to produce this third physical Writer In Residence publication. Next, I would like to say thank you to all the individuals and organizations who support Buckham Fine Arts Project and Gallery, including Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Michigan Arts and Culture Council and the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Greater Flint Arts Council Share Art Genesee Grant program made possible by the Genesee County Arts Education and Cultural Enrichment Millage Funds.

It is with gratitude and optimism that Buckham Fine Arts Project shares this publication, the culmination of our collaboration with Bob Campbell.

Michele Leclair
Executive Director

Introduction

The yearlong Writer In Residence experience was delightfully uncomfortable from the very beginning.

Upon being selected in October 2022 as just the third writer for this esteemed literary program, I felt a bit like the neighborhood dog who catches the car finally and must then decide: “[Now what?](#)” Moreover, that uncertain feeling was true from the first exhibition I wrote about to the last exhibition, which closed in October 2023. For with each fresh collection, my journey began anew in crafting an essay about how I experienced the artworks presented.

The commission was intimidating repeatedly. I am not an art scholar nor critic. I have not studied art in an academic setting, becoming versed in its rich history and knowledgeable of the various mediums, techniques and forms. More simply, I know what I like and what I don’t necessarily; what moves or fascinates me; or whether and how a work may alter my perspective. Yes, art appreciation is subjective. But it offers connection, too, in the form of a different language.

Still, the challenge remained about how to translate each experience into a coherent written composition. There were few rules or guidelines to rely upon, except for those self-imposed. Staring at my own blank canvas—whether a sheet of paper, whenever I wrote in longhand, or an empty white document on my computer screen—I would often recall a quote by Ernest Hemingway about how he coaxed himself out of writer’s block.

“[All you have to do is write one true sentence,](#)” he said. “[Write the truest sentence you know.](#)”

So, that is what I sought to do with each of the 24 essays I wrote for the 2022-2023 exhibition season. Along the way, I was reminded of the importance of stamina, discipline and patience when undertaking a lengthy creative pursuit. Additionally, the yearlong experience reinforced in an artistic sense the importance of education, as explained by American historian and first woman president of Harvard University (2007-2018) Drew Gilpin Faust, who said: “[Education asks you to change. ... Have the courage to be disturbed.](#)”

In closing, I must extend a note of gratitude to Michele Leclaire, Buckham Gallery Executive Director, and Katie Cotton, Project and Communications Coordinator, for their generous support and for putting up with my repeated visits to the gallery, as I gathered my thoughts on the different exhibitions. I also must thank the Buckham Fine Arts Project for providing me with this exhilarating opportunity. Having captured and completed this most engaging and inspiring assignment, I again ask myself: “[Now what?](#)”

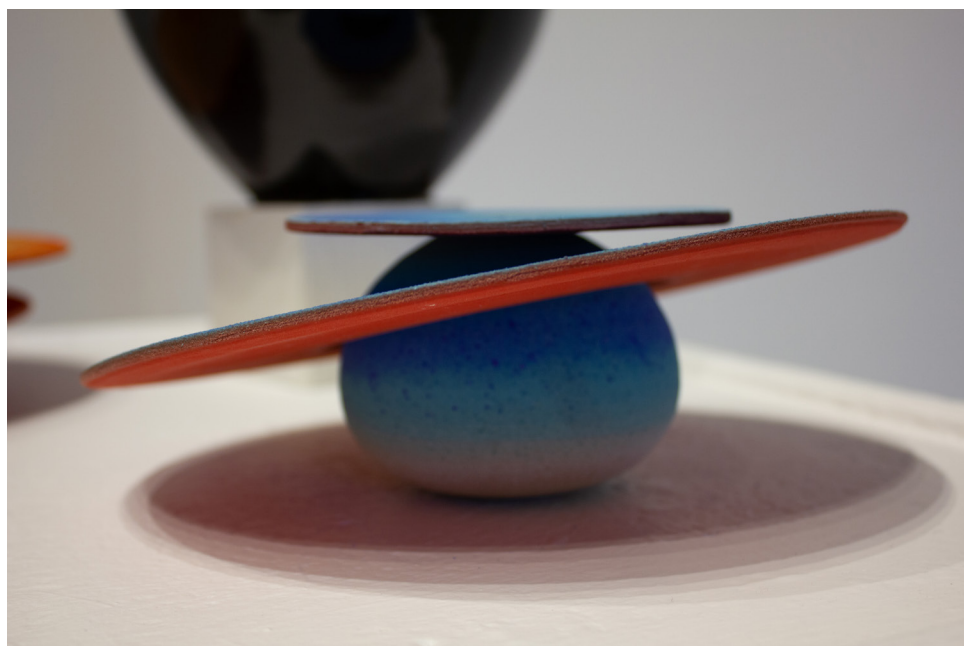
~ Bob Campbell

The Spirit of Things Remembered, Pondered

I strolled through the gallery and was transported back in time to a period that feels increasingly like another lifetime ago. Light years away, it seems. But in my mind, I had returned briefly to a glorious Saturday of my youth.

Upon entering space brightly lit by the overhead stars I pictured a constellation of celestial bodies, clustered in tiny galaxies sprinkled across a compact universe. The spherical objects floated at varying heights at points near and distant. These planet-like orbs differed in size and shape but shared a recurring theme: rings, like those of Saturn.

Pulled by the gravity of innate curiosity, I became a mortal James Webb Space Telescope and peered into the depths of the exhibition called *Ojichaagwan Vessels*.



Ojichaagwan is Ojibwe for soul (the spirit within), according to the Ojibwe People's Dictionary, and the exhibition featured 49 works of Master Potter Guy Adamec, whose vessels represent containers for the one's spirit or vessels to hold an offering a universal omniscience.



Upon closer examination, I was transfixed by the vessels' earthy textures and atmospheric colors. An experience that felt down-to-earth and familiar. At the same time, I could not escape the pull of the collection's cosmic import and otherworldly-ness. In addition to the Saturn rings, the circles of flat surfaces that characterized many of the other works evoked images of flying saucers, space flight and time travel. Ezekiel is said to have seen the wheel, way up in the middle of the air. Scholars of Christianity note the wheel-like image in the Book of Ezekiel symbolizes the universe, and the path we travel through this world and the afterlife, enduring connections between this world and the next.

Perhaps that is why the collection of *Ojichaagwan Vessels* prompted a spiritual journey that, for this aging fellow, hearkened back to a childhood of wonder and delight. A time colored by carefree Saturday mornings in front of the TV, eating bowls of Cocoa Puffs while watching *The Jetsons*, whose fanciful, cartoon skyscape was enlivened by the exhibition's constellation of vessels.

But my spiritual journey didn't end with childhood reverie. I stood before the exhibition in the here and now, and pondered my place in the vast universe beyond the walls of Buckham Gallery. To quote the late astronomer Carl Sagan:

“As long as there have been humans, we have searched for our place in the Cosmos. In the childhood of our species (when our ancestors gazed a little idly at the stars), among the scientists of ancient Greece, and in our own age, we have been transfixed by this question: Where are we? Who are we?”

The galaxies of *Ojichaagwan Vessels* offered an earthly connection to my transcendent flight.



Installation views of *Ojichaagwan Vessels*, a solo exhibition from Guy Adamec

Ojichaagwan Vessels was on view from September 23 - October 29, 2022



Michele Leclaire, "When We Swing, We Hang Past Right and Wrong," oil and mylar on panel

101 Artists was on view from September 23 - October 29, 2022

101 Artists and What Connects Us

There's a "how" and "why" to appreciating and collecting artworks. The mechanics and inspiration if you will, which may also include investment considerations. I tend to be most concerned with the subjective aspects — that is, the "why" and the "inspiration."

My most cherished works of art is a collection of oil paintings by my late mother, a gifted amateur painter and sketch artist. They're priceless, in my eyes, because of their sentimental value. The artwork also provides a window into her personality and aspirations. It's what satisfies me.

Within the *101 Artists: Selections from the Fred Danziger collection of Contemporary Art*, comprised of an array of oil paintings, watercolors, drawing and prints, one in particular gripped me. Among the ideas advanced by the traveling museum of contemporary art is to connect us to each other and the spiritual aspect of life. Here, I found myself reunited with a childhood friend.

The figures in *When We Swing* recalled Butchie and me "hanging like wet clothes," to quote that endearing phrase, on a Saturday afternoon. Even though the shadowy images appear to be feminine subjects based on their physical shapes and leotards as the pair dangle from a series of gymnastic rings, I instead saw two young boys, light and untroubled, suspended from the crossbar of a backyard swing-set or maybe the Monkey Bars at the neighborhood school playground. The sun's shine muted, as another long summer day slowly waned.

Yes. I was a kid again absorbed by the Swing, and Butchie, too, and not the mature man reminiscing about the glorious times spent with an old buddy — who died way too soon.

I cite *Swing* as just one example of what might connect someone to a work of art, which may then lead to a lifetime of collecting. There were 100 more examples in the Danziger collection for consideration, too. But experiencing the exhibition also helped me to better understand and articulate what treasure most about my mom's artwork.

I'm told that Danziger spoke animatedly that any of us can be collectors and should be. To get started, I offer a few suggestions borrowed from ArtBusiness.com:

-Do I like it for the subject matters, what it represents, what it communicates, its originality, the techniques, the colors, the historical aspects, the regions where it's made, the lives of the artists?

-Does it make me think about things I've never thought about before?

-Does it make me feel a certain way or see things in a different way?

-Does it alter or inform my perspective on some aspect of life?

-Does it portray or present things in ways they've never been presented before?

-Is it that it's old, new, local, foreign, big, small, round, square, whatever?

Although the reasons for starting an art collection are varied and personal, it really comes down to what connects with you.



Installation views of *Ojichaagwan Vessels* and *101 Artists*

Ojichaagwan Vessels and *101 Artists* were on view September 23 - October 29, 2022

STRIFE : The Struggle is Real

There are topics I'm afraid to touch as a writer. I've suspected this for some time, but only recently admitted it to myself.

The topics run the gamut of being emotionally tough, potentially embarrassing, unconventional, nontraditional or may project signs of a devious mind, at least to some people whose opinions and respect I value. So, reasoning my character might be at stake if I dare entertain them, I wrap those topics, those thoughts, in a security blanket of silence leaving my public identity intact.

No worries about addressing any nettlesome questions, like: How will this change me? What might this reveal about me? If I can't hack this, then what becomes of me?

Actually, "afraid" may be both the wrong word and part of speech. Behavior that's characterized not as an adjective but a verb. For my action, such as it is, where these fraught topics are concerned, is to "avoid" them. In doing so, the sometimes-messy business of introspection is dodged, like maybe that bullet with my name on it.

This strife — personal, internal, sometimes stifling my creativity and fruition as a writer — was laid bare for me by *Bless US* (ink and acrylic on paper, Brian Spolans) and *Tug* (black clay, Craig Hinshaw), two works in Buckham Gallery's November 5–December 3, 2022 exhibition, aptly titled **STRIFE**.





Brian Spolans, "Bless US," ink and acrylic on panel

STRIFE, a group exhibition featuring the works of Buckham Artist Collaborators was on view November 5 - December 3, 2022

Bless US stars a neighborhood enclave with a distinctly working-class feel, which, in the unquestioned and lazy parlance of the mainstream media, means a wholesome community of salt-of-the-earth white folk. The wood-framed houses bleed ooze, perhaps? red and discolored white cloth from the first- and second-floor windows. White clapboard siding is juxtaposed with the homes' darkly shaded right-sides, which then take on the quaint appearance of rustic cabins whose walls are made of stacked logs. Roof shingles resemble walls of brick.

Machine gun turrets sited as second-floor lookouts from elevated positions might be mistaken at first glance for TV satellite dishes, and may, in fact, have been used for that purpose once upon a time. Additionally, an assortment of artillery and missiles protrude through some of the rooftops in a manner after the NRA's own heart. The private, gated domiciles are further safeguarded by sandbags in the driveways and barbed wire strung along sidewalks.

The street's black asphalt pavement is cracked throughout. Overhead, an ominous black sky has descended upon this working-class neighborhood.

Flapping in the imaginary wind is an overabundance of Old Glory—American flags that dot the landscape, outnumbering the houses pictured, as some residences fly more than one.

A display of patriotism run amok, or polarization? Are they one in the same?

Out my way in northwest Oakland County, there is a house with a half-dozen or so, good-sized U.S. flags draped on individual poles along a country road. It's a wall of flags. I wondered: Do more flags make one more American, or less? Does a single one or, perhaps, none at all?

Farther north along the same road and across the county line into southeastern Genesee where landscape turns more suburban, I then spot an American flag flown beside a McDonald's flag outside the restaurant bearing the same name. Seeing the iconic red flag emblazoned with those golden arches flying high-above the restaurant compound helps alert weary travelers from a distance that a hot meal, with fries and a drink, is available right here and now at McDonald Land. And don't you deserve a break today? Of course, you do. Right?

Does the presence of American flags, today, serve up a similar message for weary citizens? Maybe the nonverbal communicate is meant to make it abundantly clear about who belongs — I mean, really belongs — and who is merely a visitor, subject to the rules, whims and wishes of the host. *So, relax, and take comfort in knowing that you're safe. You're among Americans. The real ones, that is.*

Consider this: I have an American flag hanging on an inside wall of my garage. It's there, in part, to honor my father's service in World War II. Still, my son, as well as several nieces, have questioned its real purpose. They have accused me of attempting to placate my white neighbors by appearing to be non-threatening by way of the Stars and Stripes. That's because, in their minds, the American flag had been hijacked by those who seek to undo America by whitewashing its history and true identity. (After all, why else would you see the venerable Old Glory flown alongside a flag for "the former guy"?)

If that's true, then not unlike the way I've protected myself with a blanket of silence by avoiding certain topics, does the citizenry believe wrapping itself in the American flag provides protection from the "dark skies" descending upon US?

After all, doing so means no more discomforting questions, like: How will this change US? What might this reveal about US? And what then will become of US? Yes, they can all be avoided.

Whether such private displays of the American flag, as captured in *Bless US*, is a sign of patriotism, run amok, or insignia of our polarization is in eye of the beholder. A symbol not of our unity but of our public strife, at least for some.

Hence, the *Tug*, a black clay sculpture of a short, thick and taut rope gripped by four hands — two each on opposite ends displayed immediately left of *Bless US*. The intensity of the tussle is apparent in those dual-clenched fists, and the side-by-side placement of the two works struck me as very deliberate. As the two works from war-themed collection reflected, the struggle is real.



Craig Hinshaw, "Tug," black clay

STRIFE, a group exhibition featuring the works of Buckham Artist Collaborators was on view November 5 - December 3, 2022

An Ode to Johnny and Old Abram Brown

Empty Road, Great Tornado resurrected my childhood fright of the unknown and that uneasy feeling you're not alone when your objective reality says you should be. Of the collection's 10 lithographic prints by artist Emmett Merrill, a number featuring nightmarish scenes, I found *The Camping Trip* most affecting.

The print depicts a standing young couple cozied up in a red-and-black lumberjack blanket on a moonlit evening. A small campfire burns to their right. Behind them, a clothesline is strung up between dual T-posts — the same kind that was in the backyard of my childhood that my mom used sometimes to dry laundry on warm, sunny days. A pair of socks and a sheer fabric hangs on the clothesline. Hovering over the top of the fabric is a gruesome red face with coal black eyes watching the couple. The demonic figure's spidery fingers appear to be pressing down on the fabric for an unobstructed view of the couple, whose backs are turned toward it.

In ground beneath them is a transparent coffin containing a skeletal corpse all dressed up in his funeral best. The remains lying in repose underground could be that of "Old Abram Brown," the character in that English folk song we used to sing in elementary school music class; its haunting melody sang in rounds. Or maybe he's someone else.

In 1970, my then-11-year-old sister went away for a week or two stay at a Girl Scout camp at The Timbers, a recreational campsite about seven miles southwest of Traverse City. Upon returning home, this loving sister — five years my senior — told the rest of her younger siblings a story about some kid named Johnny, who was sent on an errand to buy some liver.

As the story goes, Johnny got distracted along the way and spent the money on sweets. So, to fulfill his mother's order, he instead goes to the graveyard and stole the liver from a freshly buried corpse. That evening the ghost of the deceased returned to reclaim the stolen organ, stating: "Johnny, I want my liver back."

If memory serves me right, she shared the creepy tale of retribution one evening during a weekend stay at our family's cottage at Shay Lake in Tuscola County. The drive there often took us past an old funeral home at Second and Pine streets in the tiny village of Columbiaville. Farther north, we'd then pass the small Dayton Center Cemetery on Hurds Corner Road before arriving a short drive later at the lake.

Were those places—the funeral home and cemetery—haunts of the ghost who came for Johnny? And what about that old, abandoned boathouse at the water's edge in the lot adjacent to our cottage? That white cinderblock building, sagging in a gradual state of collapse, as soil beneath it heaved and sank continually over the years, seemed tailor-made for an unsettled soul, especially at night.

"I think ghost stories are an exploration of the uneasy feeling of the unknown, not just the cliché of not feeling alone in a dark room, but also the excitement and anxiety of entering an unfamiliar building, landscape, town, et cetera," said Merrill, about his exhibition.

Indeed. I hadn't thought about the little Johnny and his ghostly caller, or Old Abram Brown, in many years. That is until I was taken aback by *The Camping Trip* and the unease, excitement and anxiety that came with it.



Emmett Merrill, "Camping Trip," lithograph

Empty Road, Great Tornado was on view December 9, 2022 - January 3, 2023.



Kate Snow, “*Library Series: The Ever Expanding ‘To Read’ Pile,*” gouache and printmaking ink on panel

“*Library Series: The Ever Expanding ‘To Read’ Pile*” was featured in Kate Snow’s Solo Exhibition *Nice Things for Nice People* from December 9, 2022 - January 3, 2023.

Nice Things for Nice People this Christmas

Touring Kate Snow’s exhibit, *Nice Things for Nice People*, I was struck by the simplicity of the collected works of 32 abstract paintings of varying sizes. So uncomplicated and undemanding; so personal.

Being a writer and lover of books, painting No. 11 struck a chord instantly. A stack of books on a table or my nightstand, I thought; and continued on viewing the other selections. It wasn’t until a return trip a week or so later that I learned its title, *Library Series: The Ever Expanding ‘To Read’ Pile*. I smiled at the intimacy of the brief experience.

Overall, seeing the exhibition when I did during mid and late December, I felt a twinge of the holiday spirit of Christmases past. A number of the paintings evoked the pristine solitude of wintry landscapes underneath frosty night heavens, with bottoms of white terrain topped off by darkened skies of black and slate. I then re-read the exhibition’s title – Nice Things for Nice People – and the sound Donny Hathaway’s classic “This Christmas” began playing in my head. A December 2017 article in *The New Yorker* noted how the song has become “enshrined as *the* black Christmas anthem,” since its release more than a half-century ago in 1970. As described in the article:

“A pickup on the drums kick-starts the song like a parade, thick with vintage brass and syncopated sleigh bells, before an organ lights the way to the first lines: “Hang all the mistletoe, I’m gonna get to know you better.”

The holiday season doesn't really begin for me until I hear "This Christmas" on the radio. However, it's not simply the song's virtuosity and joyfulness that moves me. There's also a poignant, implicit sentiment expressed, which The New Yorker article also touched on:

[T]he song's emphasis on this Christmas does hint that other Christmases might not have been so great. That lyrical turn is what makes "This Christmas" a quintessential striver's anthem. An underdog spirit rings through the title phrase, where the stress on all three syllables denotes a "this is my year" kind of tenacity and the rhyme of "this" with "Chris" shows how everything might click into place.

I've long heard that silent emotion expressed in the song by Hathaway, who suffered from mental illness and died by suicide nearly a decade later after releasing his Christmas classic. Moreover, there was more than enough despair to go around at the time — from the ongoing war in Vietnam to the heroin epidemic ravaging the big cities to personal demons — giving the tune a universal appeal.

As I viewed Snow's work, the collection seemed to reflect a similar underdog, striver spirit. I paused and then read the artist statement where she expressed a familiar artist lament, which is: Who gives a really gives a damn about this, with so many other problems in the world? In the grand scheme of things, does this work even matter?

Snow, in her own words:

I first started experimenting with this series in 2019, with a 2021 exhibition in mind. At the time, no one knew what 2020 and beyond would look like and as the exhibition grew closer, I started to worry. In the wake of so much global pain associated with Covid-19, violence, environmental disaster, and economic uncertainty, was work like this still relevant? Should I be making serious art about serious issues instead?

Then someone reminded me: at present, the stolen moments when things feel normal are a relief and necessary; that art being created just for enjoyment is responsive to these times in its own way. It's not the same, but it shouldn't be. It serves a different purpose.

These works are silly, irreverent, and absurd. Squares and dots become characters in their own worlds. They move and interact, making friends, getting lost, or just existing as their own little simple selves. It's hard for me not to find joy in their little antics. I hope you do too.

I did, indeed. The collection was so very special for me.

That was Then; This is Now

In describing his *Recent Work* exhibition, artist Michael Melet explained his “artwork is about the connections, the hope and imagination that is at the core of us all. It’s what makes us human. We don’t understand many things, but we dream and wonder anyway.”



The aspirational theme of the nine collages of lively magazine images is, for me, redolent of “The Big 80s.” Swatches of fashion, style and attitude abound in ways that are bold, confident and seductive. Beauty and desire also imbue the collection.

The go-go '80s was the decade I crossed over into adulthood having graduated high school in 1982 and began the long process of trying to figure out things for myself. A lifelong endeavor, I've since learned.

During that period, the doubt that had seeped into the national psyche from the preceding decade following a “peace with honor” withdrawal or defeat in Vietnam, sky-high inflation, oil embargoes and the Iran hostage crisis was being erased by renewed faith in our divine status as that shining city on a hill.

The retired Hollywood actor who had been elected president (twice) declared it was morning in America, a place now so sunny and bright and idyllic you could almost taste the Jimmy Dean Sausage in the air. Except, of course, in Flint where the sun had begun to set on the city's fortunes, influence and relevance, leaving an acrid taste in the mouths of us young adults of the working class, who wondered silently: Where did *our* love go?

Meanwhile, the great transfer of wealth from the middle-class to the top one percent was underway, thanks to Reaganomics. Yuppies replaced hippies, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* and *Miami Vice* became must-see TV, and the English pop band ABC inquired lyrically about *How to be a Millionaire*.

“Maybe these luxuries can only compensate
For all the cards you were dealt at the hands of fate (so tell me)
Tell me, tell me
How to be (how to be) a millionaire”

Success equals consumption the more, better. And that makes the world go ‘round. So, hop aboard, son, or get left behind.

That was then. The desires and concerns are different now, which the exhibit also reflects.

If one part of Melet's *Recent Work* illustrates the big and loud roar of consumerism (intentionally or not) in fulfilling one's hopes and bringing to life that which resides in the imagination, another part collectively titled *Behind Every Man* offers a counterpose. Here, a series of four separate and equally quiet charcoal sketches depict five, self-actualized men in their twilight of their lives.

The takeaway from *Every Man* is as resonant for me as the nine collages. Life changes and, with it, the approach to living.



Guen Montgomery, "Beehive," ceramic

"Beehive" was featured in Guen Montgomery's Solo Exhibition *Crawl Space* from January 13 - February 11, 2023

The B-52's Closet

When The B-52's busted out with "Rock Lobster" in the late 1970s, my friends and I were blown away by the band's punk/new wave beat. It was kind of a dated, ghoulish sound '60s surfer music fused with The Munsters' theme reborn into something fresh, innovative and otherworldly. And the lyrics were crazy.

Lots of trouble (Hoorah)

Lots of bubble (Hoorah)

He was in a jam (Hoorah)

He's in a giant clam (Hoorah)

Later, in 1982, the Electrifying Mojo the spellbinding DJ who graced the radio airwaves from his lair at WGPR in Detroit would spin the band's latest jam "Mesopotamia" nightly, transporting us all back "about a hundred thousand years" where we'd meet up by "the third pyramid."

Of course, there were more hits, too: "Planet Claire," "Private Idaho," "Roam" and, later, the party favorite "Love Shack." The B-52's' sound is fun, accessible, whimsical, freeing and inspires confidence to express oneself; for you to be you.

I imagine The B-52's closet would look a lot like the artworks in Guen Montgomery's *Crawl Space* exhibition. In fact, the yellow Beehive ceramic sculpture looks as if it was molded from one of the wigs worn by bandmates Kate Pierson and Cindy Wilson. The Beehive hairdo, widely popular in the 1960s, was also known as "the B-52" because its cone-like appearance resembled the distinctive nose of the B-52 plane. Hence, the band's name.

Other works in the exhibit – prints made from fur and clothing inked and printed on an etching press – seem to reflect and celebrate the band’s “thrift store” chic. In an August 2018 article in GARAGE magazine, Wilson explained The B-52’s iconic style:

“Those were the thrift store days. Kate and I were being playful on the photo shoot, so we switched wigs. She wore the blonde one and I wore the golden-brown helmet hair. In the beginning, we weren’t really polished, but to me, those were some of the best days. We were just starting out and having fun in thrift stores. We were very playful with fashion, kind of on the arty side.”

As a group that fashioned its character from the remnants of discarded, rarely used possessions, I think The B-52’s would feel right at home in the *Crawl Space*.



Installation views of *Crawl Space*, a solo exhibition from Guen Montgomery.

Crawl Space was on view from January 13 - February 11, 2023

On These Streets



Whitney Lea Sage, "230 Pasadena Street," acrylic ink on Aquaboard

Portraits of Home was on view January 13 - February 11, 2023

My childhood home was demolished in the spring of 2021—a victim not of the COVID-19 pandemic but of an era whose time had passed. My parents built that modest house on Flint's expanding southside in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

At the time, the street in that lightly populated part of town was still unpaved and the elementary school that my five siblings and I would later attend, along with our friends, just up the street not yet built. The urban landscape would change quickly and dramatically, though, as Flint rode the wave of a then-surgingly automobile industry.

However, the golden age of Flint and the Elm Park neighborhood where our house stood was well behind in the rearview mirror by 2021. And by April that same year, a vacant lot of brown dirt had replaced the silver maples, white plank-board fence and L-shaped, cinderblock ranch that formerly occupied the land. There are more vacant lots on that street, too.

Portraits of Home took me home again to the place forever etched in my memory. The arrangement of the 47 small, oval-shaped works—"meticulously rendered monochromatic ink drawings on watercolor paper and aquaboard panels" by Whitney Lea Sage—conveyed the rich density of the neighborhoods of old. Whether in Detroit and Highland Park, where exhibition drew its inspiration, or in Flint.

Likewise, the streets lined by the faded and absent homes depicted in the exhibition, as well as those of memory, whispered to me. So many questions:

How many games of touch football were played on these streets?

How many first downs reached? How many passes picked off?
How many touchdowns scored?

How many games of kickball and four square?

How many races run, and ropes jumped?

How many activities paused, momentarily, to allow cars to pass?
How many drivers asked to park in driveways or up a little ways?

How many bicycles raced? How many wheelies popped?

How many knees skinned, and elbows bruised on these streets?

How many dukes put up to settle scores before things were cool again later that afternoon or the next day? How many fat lips traded among friends?

How many straw boat races held during the spring thaw, or after a heavy rain, in the gutters along these curbs?

How many kids with fistfuls of nickels and dimes and quarters scrambled to catch the ice cream boy after being lured by the jingle-jangling bells on his three-wheeled ice box?

How many stops did the milkman make?

How many footfalls trampled the pavement, as kids stampeded home from nearby elementary schools just up the block or a few streets over?

How many brown, withered leaves, from bygone silver maples and elms that once shaded these streets all summer long, settled there before being cleared away?

How many memories were made on these streets?

More than they'll ever be, ever again?



Installation view of *Portraits of Home*, a solo exhibition from Whitney Lea Sage.

Portraits of Home was on view January 13 - February 11, 2023

R a d i o S i l e n c e



If *Interior Visions: Domestic Sphere* were a personal journal instead of 12 exquisite oil paintings by Stephanie Serpick, the handwritten entries might read something like this:



Day 1
It's the way the moonlight strikes the sheets. Soft. Sensuous. The rumpled white linens against the room's darkness. The alluring shadows,

I could lay here all day, with you.



Day 2
She had stayed the night and left sometime later without waking me. The room is chilled,



Day 3
I linger in the gloominess of the barren house, looking out the windows from different vantage points; a front window here, a rear window there,

I saw a black-and-white tuxedo cat tiptoe across the backyard before vanishing into a thicket of shrubbery. It was gone.

45



Day 4

Friday night I hit bottom after a night of heavy drinking. The bill came due this morning.

Day 5

The nights have grown longer and colder than any other in recent memory. The purge has begun. A withdrawal illness that feels like slow death.

I'm scared to move just for the sake of moving. But some movement is better than paralysis, right?

Day 6

I never thought I'd feel the way I do right now. Completely lost without light. Trapped. Freedom never felt so bad.



Day 7

I cannot get out of bed. At first, I thought maybe it's plain, old laziness. But increasingly I feel like, "What's the use?"

Day 8

I lay there until I can't take it anymore. Later, I lament the time wasted. Tomorrow will be different.

Day 9

... I've been saying that now for more than a week. Nothing changes.



Day 10

Sleep, sleep, a friend so dear,
Please come down on me, Wisk me
away from this waking world to
that island paradise of the night,
Take me to that place where
dreams live on, at least until the
morning comes, Rescue my tired
body this evening, Rescue my tired
mind, Come down on me so that I
may have the strength to make
it through another tomorrow.



Day 11

I still haven't spoken to her...
Radio silence.

Day 12

What I miss most is the sex, I don't miss the conversation,
She was too opinionated, too combative for my taste, Her
sense of humor was lacking, And the curttness! No, it's the sex
I crave...

That's a lie, I miss her; all of her, Everything.



Day 1: *Void of Modern Life #4*, Day 2: *Void of Modern Life #7*,
Day 3: *Void of Modern Life #9*, Day 4: *A New Fall #18*,
Day 5: *A New Fall #34*, Day 6: *A New Fall #17*, Day 7: *A New Fall #2*,
Day 8: *A New Fall #35*, Day 9: *A New Fall #25*,
Day 10: *Void of Modern Life #14*, Day 11: *Void of Modern Life #12*
Day 12: *A New Fall #22*
All oil on panel

Interior Visions: Domestic Sphere, a solo exhibition from Stephanie Serpick
was on view January 13 - February 11, 2023

Color, Context, Nuance



Danielle Mužina, “*By the Blessings of My Mother*,” oil, acrylic and spray paint on panel

“*By the Blessings of My Mother*,” was featured in Danielle Mužina’s Solo Exhibition *A Reckoning in Pink* from February 18- March 18, 2023

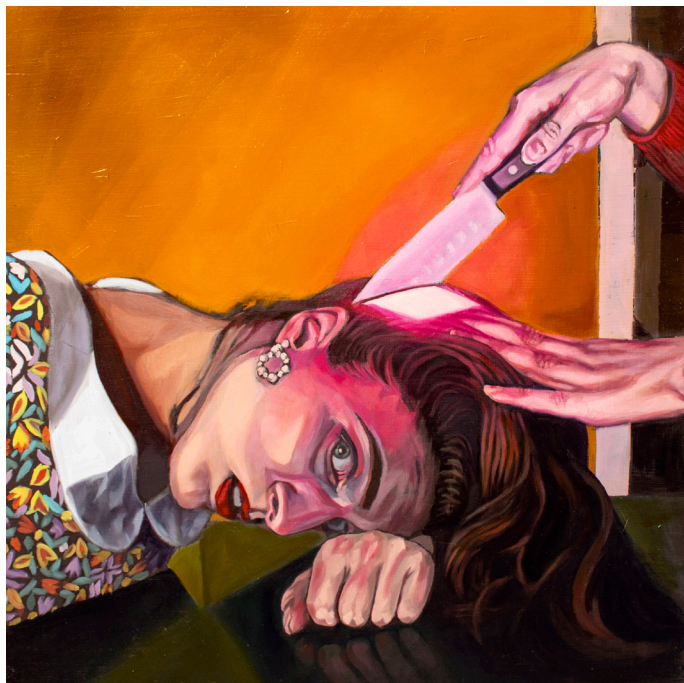
Viewing *A Reckoning in Pink* exhibition for the first time, the slasher horror movies of the late 1970s to the mid-80s came to mind. Panicked young women, along with their male companions, fleeing from the constant threat of death by mutilation at the hands of some twisted dude, stalking them for reasons I still cannot fathom.

I never cared for those gory movies. The essentially plotless flicks never made any sense to me, and the gruesome scenes of mass murder disturbing. I managed to stomach a few, in part because a girlfriend at the time enjoyed them for some reason. Still, the only things the teenage me got out of them was, one, a date; and two, the occasional eye-candy of watching young adults getting busy on screen — you know, having simulated sex — before one or both lovers were grisly dispatched to meet their maker.

The crazed perpetrator, whose identity was always masked in some way, simply could not be vanquished, at least until the very end. And, of course, the victims were always white — it is Hollywood, at all — which often inspired uproarious analysis from Black friends. Commentary that went something like this: “See, that would have been a real short movie if it were Black folks in it. Because we would have got the fuck out of Dodge at the first sign of [fill in the blank].”

And so, in reconsidering those old slasher movies after viewing *A Reckoning in Pink*, I wondered: Were any of those flicks some kind of “artistic” pushback—a spoiled response, of sorts—against the rise of feminism in the 1970s? A subtle (or maybe not so subtle) message that young women who dared to embrace a new era of independence and sexual liberation, and the young men who welcomed it, could face a devilish demise? That there’s a price to be paid for challenging the gender roles within our contemporary society?

Maybe. Maybe not. But who’s telling the story often matters, for context and nuance.



Danielle Mužina’s collection of 14 paintings in oils and acrylics offers an intriguing exploration of the human condition, unlike some empty slasher film. Women are the central figures in each painting. Women whose bodies, or well-being, are being molested or tampered with in some way. Bodies, perhaps, that they do not control. Menacing scenes are evoked, complete with bloody daggers, raised cleavers and axes, and cliques of antagonists—both male and female—bent on harming or controlling the protagonist.

Mužina explained the exhibit questions gender performance in relation to gender roles within our contemporary society. Being a survivor during the #MeToo movement, she added the work was heavily inspired by the testimony of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford during the infamous Senate confirmation hearings for the now-Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. The work is as powerful, troubling and courageous as was Blasey Ford’s testimony.



Absorbing the exhibition while strolling the gallery, I also wondered how different Mužina’s images would feel and what messages might be conveyed, intended or not, if the paintings were the work of a male artist.

Previous Page: Danielle Mužina, “*Pink Slit*,” oil on panel
Above: Danielle Mužina, “*Madonna del Parte*,” oil and acrylic on panel

A Reckoning in Pink was on view February 18- March 18, 2023



Jeanne Ciravolo, "Daughter," Mixed Media, mesh produce bag, paper doily, and collage on drop cloth

Tokens & Traces was on view February 18- March 18, 2023

I'm Every Daughter

As an extension, perhaps, of the written medium and reading, my eyes traveled instinctively from left to right when viewing *Daughter*, one of the 11 artworks in *Tokens and Traces* by Jeanne Ciravolo.

Even before I learned the title of the work—a mixed media composition combining a mesh produce bag, paper doily and collage on a drop cloth—I sensed a calm mother caressing the face of an anxious daughter, as the offspring prepared to depart their orderly surroundings for the messiness she would undoubtedly encounter outside.

I saw my mother addressing, one by one, her four beautiful daughters; each one on the cusp of womanhood, though at different times. Each one different in their own way, physically as well as in temperament.

Although I wasn't privy to any personal, one-on-one conversations momma had with either of my sisters, I'm certain that by the end of their chat she left each one feeling like they were the most important person in the world. That they were prepared, she assured, for what may lay ahead. That she would forever remain with them, if not in body then in spirit.

That's the kind of person momma was. True to the lyrics of Chaka Khan's anthem of modern femininity, she was indeed "every woman." And in each of her four daughters were traces of herself.

Momma knew. For she was a daughter, too.

The Love Between Here and There

Between Here and There, flowers are a motif in the exhibition's 20 works by ceramic artist Kimberly LaVonne. The nondescript silhouettes of blooms could be that of allamandas, camellias, gardenias or plumeria pudica, a native plant of Panama, Colombia and Venezuela. Also present in the works are the likenesses of other flora native to Latin and South America, such as species of Elephant Ear Vine, Coffee Plant or Banana Leaf.



The vibrant and richly detailed pottery—a variety of bowls, vases and other earthenware with images and patterns carved into the surfaces—reflects LaVonne's celebration of and allegiance to her Panamanian heritage.

For me, the exhibition harkened back to reading the lyrical, vivid descriptions in the prose of Columbian novelist, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, one of my favorite authors. I imagined the exhibition's items as housewares in Garcia Marquez's novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

Set around the turn of the 20th century in the District of the Viceroy, a fictional port city in the northwestern region of South America, the novel is a tale of the artistic Florentino Ariza and the wealthy Fermina Daza, whose love affair takes decades to be consummated after more than 50 years apart. Their relationship commences only after the death of Fermina's esteemed husband, Dr. Juvenal Urbino, who fell to his death on Pentecost Sunday while trying to retrieve his pet parrot from a mango tree in the yard.

Themes in *Love in the Time of Cholera* include aging and death. The faces of some of the heroines etched on LaVonne's earthenware could be portraits of Fermina at different stages of her life, both physically and emotionally.



Previous Page: Kimberly LaVonne, "*Mujeres de Mi Línea*," ceramic
Above: Kimberly LaVonne, "*Selena in Braids*," ceramic

Between Here and There was on view February 18- March 18, 2023

The third, and dominant, theme of the novel is, of course, love. Any reference to flowers or floral imagery in the story is symbolic of the presence of love. Florentino makes a strong association between flowers and love. He expresses his affections for Fermina (as well as a number of his mistresses over the years) by sending them flowers. Florentino uses flowers—camellias and roses, in particular—to express his feelings for Fermina and to remember her. He eats gardenias and rose petals to know and consume Fermina, symbolically. Florentino also sends Fermina a white camellia, the “flower of promise,” a gesture that represents his undying love for her.

In addition to his lush, poetic prose, Garcia Marquez’s literature is known for its use of magic realism, a chiefly Latin-American narrative strategy where magic, spirits, and other fantastical concepts exist within everyday life and the characters do not generally consider their existence strange or absurd. He most famously employed the technique in his masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I sensed elements of magic realism in LaVonne’s work, too, principally in the piece titled “*Diablico Sucio*,” or “*Dirty Devils*.”



But as with *Love in the Time of Cholera*, an ambiance of love permeates the space *Between Here and There*. Love of place; love of heritage; love of technique. And in a way not unlike the experience of reading that novel, I was just as absorbed by LaVonne’s collection.



Previous Page: Installation view of *Between Here and There*
Above: Kimberly LaVonne, “*Diablico Sucio*,” ceramic

Between Here and There was on view February 18- March 18, 2023

The power of
passion:

Sam Morello's
impact on the
local arts
community

I am here, in part, because of Sam Morello.

By here, I mean in this space, engaging with artworks in a way that I hadn't before being selected as the 2022-2023 Writer in Residence for the Buckham Fine Arts Project at Buckham Gallery. I'll elaborate.

You see, 31 years ago, I was a cub reporter for the *Flint Journal*. In early January 1992, I was assigned to do a feature story about the opening of a new exhibition at a little museum, located up a steep flight of stairs, at 134 ½ W. Second St., a couple of blocks over from the newspaper.

There, at Buckham Gallery, I interviewed graphic arts collector Dan Walsh, whose trove of political posters from around the world was the subject of a new exhibition, titled *The Oppositional Posters of Liberation Graphics*. The exhibit included selections from poster artists from Cuba, the Middle East, South America, Vietnam and Eastern Europe.

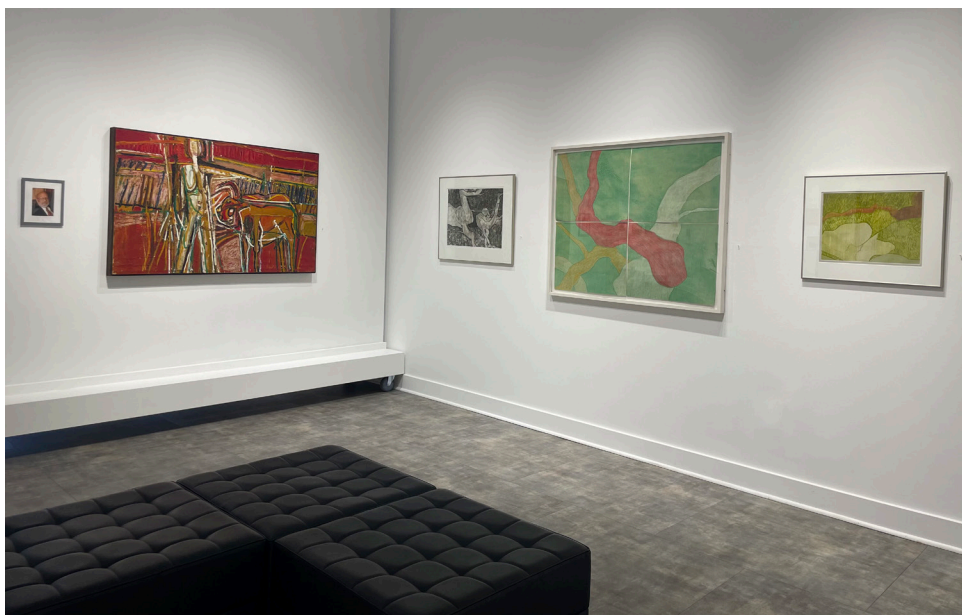
Oppositional poster artists aren't "gallery folk," Walsh told me. "We don't usually get invited to galleries."

John Dempsey, then-president of the Gallery's board of directors, added that Walsh had been invited to Buckham because there was a similarity in what he sought to do politically and what the gallery was doing culturally. "Our mission is to bring contemporary art to the gallery in all forms," Dempsey said. "You don't have to go to New York to participate in the culture of your community."

My subsequent article was published the next day in the *Flint Journal* as a top-of-the-fold, section front, which was a noteworthy newspaper placement in those days. Although not the cachet of a top-of-the-fold A1 story, it was a decidedly decent play for a relatively green reporter.

What does this have to do with Morello, an esteemed printmaker, artist and former art department chair at Mott Community College? Plenty. He was the thread that connected the three of us — Walsh, Dempsey and me — on that cold January day three decades ago.

Morello is one of the founders of Buckham Gallery, which has entered its 40th year as a nonprofit arts organization. In recognition of his substantial contributions to the greater Flint arts community and Buckham specifically, the Gallery hosted the exhibition *Sam Morello: Selected Works* in his honor.



Of the selection's 22 detailed artworks, 18 were produced using a process known as intaglio — both a word and technique I knew nothing about with prior to viewing the Morello exhibition. I have since learned that intaglio is a printing technique where the image is incised or engraved into a metal plate and the ink is applied to the recessed areas. The plate is then pressed onto paper, creating a raised impression of the image. The term “intaglio” comes from the Italian word “intagliare,” which means “to engrave.”

In the exhibition's summary, Buckham co-founder Jan Murdock Hartranft wrote that “[w]ithout (Morello's) early and then steadfast involvement over time, we might not be looking at his art — or anyone's — in Buckham Gallery 40 years later.”

Nor would I be here — in Residence — learning and growing as a writer as I experience the range of thought-provoking, peculiar and extraordinary artworks that have found, and continue to find, a temporary home at Buckham Gallery.



Previous Page: Installation view of *Sam Morello Selected Works*
Above: Sam Morello, “*Aspens*,” intaglio & relief print

Sam Morello Selected Works was on view April 7 - May 13, 2023

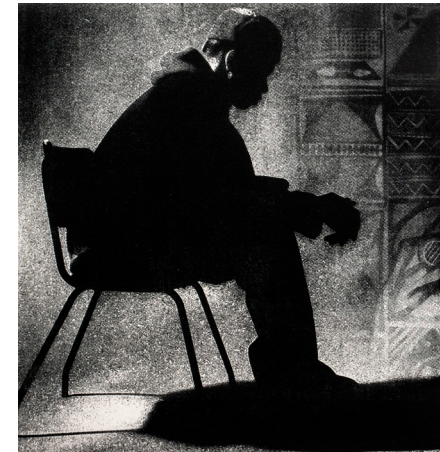
A Small World: The charm of petite artworks

As I walked into *Small Works*, a national juried exhibition, I was immediately struck by the intricate and delicate nature of the pieces on display. The exhibition featured artworks from a range of different artists, each with their own unique style and approach to creating art. Despite the diverse range of artworks on display, there was a common thread that tied them all together: each piece was small in size, but compelling in its ability to capture the imagination and evoke emotion.

One of the first pieces that caught my eye was *The Native American and the Bootlegger*, a vivid painted relief carving on linoleum by Caitlin Kilpatrick. The pocket-sized work—about 3.25” x 4”—depicts a woman and man dressed in simple attire standing against a bright yellow background. The setting is evocative of a couple standing somewhere on the Great Plains with an intense, post-midday sun at their backs. It felt a bit like *American Gothic* (Grant Wood, 1930) re-imagined.



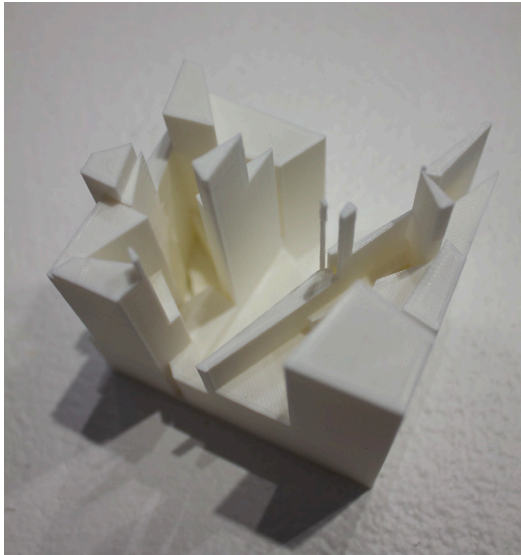
Moving on, I came across *Introspection in Black*, polyester plate lithography by Ed Watkins. The portrait features a silhouette of a seated young Black male, elbows resting upon his knees, who looks to be bearing the weight of the world on his shoulders or simply in deep thought. The shadow he casts in the 9” x 7” lithograph is large and, at first glance, might be mistaken for his belongings gathered on the floor around his feet, as though he were waiting for transport to some undefined destination. Viewed from the top down, the figure’s distinctness appears emergent alongside the textured background.



On an opposite wall, I was drawn to the lushness of *Rum Island*, David LaPalombara’s oil painting on an 8” x 5” hardwood panel. Situated just off the coast of an equally verdant mainland that colors the background, the petite island’s dense vegetation rises above a rocky shoreline and is reflected on the lake’s tranquil waters. The slight bend of the treetops—pine trees, perhaps—gave the scene, for me, a late summer or early autumn feel in Michigan. So, why the name *Rum Island*?



Another highlight of the exhibition, for me, is *Hybrid Landscape 01*, a PLA 3D printed work by Kurt Neiswender. Roughly 3" x 3" in size, the PLA (or Polylactic Acid) sculpture is an example of an artist's creation derived from employing the technology of the day and resembles a lilliputian cityscape, only smaller. The precise, clean lines of the miniature skyscrapers, and the resultant urban canyons and plateaus, reflect the art and science of architecture on a micro-level.



Other works within the exhibition were attention-grabbing as well, including *Welcome* (mixed media-acrylic and collage on tar paper/ Claudia Hershman), *Hand Cut 3* (graphite on paper/Houston Fryer) and *Final Girl* (graphite on paper/Katie Baker).

Overall, the exhibition demonstrated the power of art to transcend size and scale; intricate drawings and artworks that take up no more than a few square inches of space. Despite the small size of each piece, the exhibition conveyed a remarkable sense of depth and meaning. Each piece is a testament to the creativity and skill of the artist behind it.



Installation view of *Small Works*, National Juried Exhibition,
juried by Brian Spolans

Small Works was on view April 7 - May 13, 2023

Beyond the Physical Aesthetics

Way back in the mid-1970s at the height of Farrah Fawcett's popularity, my late Aunt Marion dished out some sage commentary about the woman who had rocketed to fame as one the original *Charlie's Angels*. She wasn't speaking to me at the time, but I was within earshot of the conversation.

Following the release of the now-iconic red swimsuit poster featuring a close-up of the actress with sandy blonde, feathered hair, her head tilted back just so and cheesing amorously at the camera, Fawcett's celebrity reached the stratosphere. Even though you had to be The Six Million Dollar Man (aka, Lee Majors, to whom she was married then) to get next to her, that didn't stop many-a-boy young and old from fantasizing about America's newest favorite pinup girl and sex symbol. Meanwhile, young women everywhere began biting off her hairstyle. Biting off which is to say copying.

Still, Aunt Marion's take on Fawcett was more earthbound. Said my auntie: "She's hair and teeth."

Hair and teeth. Teeth and hair: symbols of hygiene and status. And, yes, sex appeal, too.

The cultural significance of these physical characteristics doesn't end there, as *Teeth & Hair* exhibited over the course of 17 works by various artists selected from a national juried competition. For example, "the infamous Tooth Fairy collects baby teeth for their nefarious deeds in exchange for coins. Many lovers have collected locks of hair from the subject of their affections to have a piece of them with them," as stated in the exhibition's abstract.

Meanwhile, practical aspects of teeth and hair in the animal kingdom may serve to protect, to insulate, to camouflage, to signal, to sense a creature's immediate surroundings or a combination of several functions. A snarling dog baring its teeth or a polar bear's white fur coat are two examples.

However, it's the role of teeth and hair among humans as an indicator of one's worth, desirability or ideology, as defined by society, that intrigues.

Consider the *Black Hair Chronicles*, three separate works comprised of lithography, watercolor, paper and ink by Gyona Rice. Whether they represent the concept of beauty transformed, beauty expanded or something altogether different, the trio of prints are a significant departure from Fawcett's "hair and teeth." Rendered portraits of confident Black women against a backdrop of vibrant hues of blue, burnt orange, purple, slate, red and gold, colors that overpower subtle, printed messages of perm, hair-straightening and the hours required for braids.

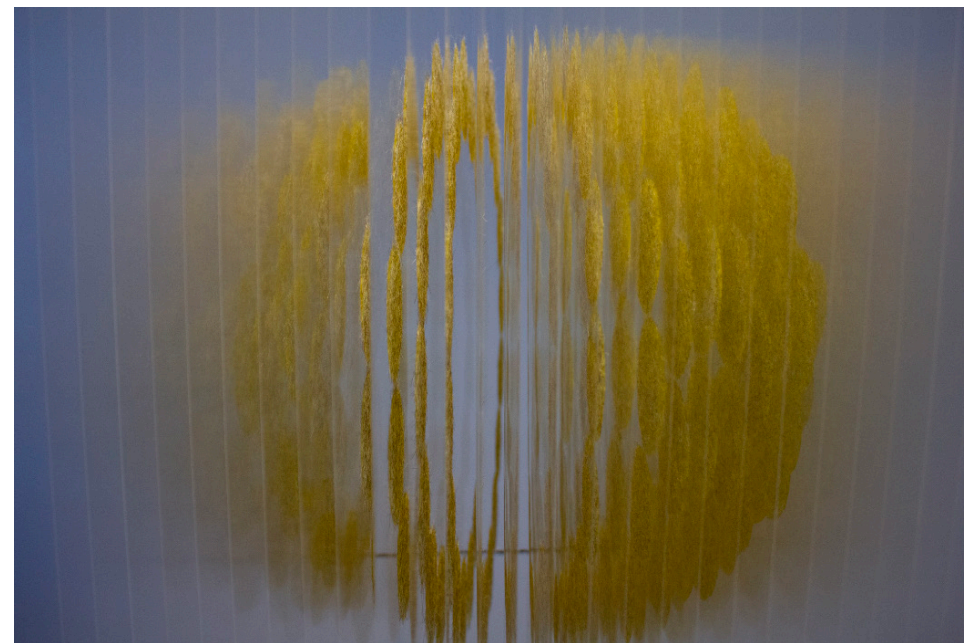


Gyona Rice, (L-R) "Black Hair Chronicles (Erykah Badu)," *Black Hair Chronicles (Cicely Tyson)*, and "Black Hair Chronicles (Solange)," lithography, watercolor, paper, ink

Teeth & Hair was on view April 7 - May 13, 2023

And what about that large *Hair Ball* suspended from the ceiling near the gallery's entrance? Russell Prather's work of human hair pressed between layers of polyester film resembles a great big and golden blonde Afro Puff when viewed at a distance and the correct vantage point. However, upon closer examination and from a different position a ball doesn't have sides, not unlike disembodied hair one sees a thinly sliced sphere comprised of 29 separate sheets of polyester film.

Considering the poster of Fawcett (who, by the way, left the Angels after one season for more substantial roles and later divorced Majors), *Black Hair Chronicles* and *Hair Ball*, are each metaphors of an illusion of some type or shrewd statements about how there's often more than meets the eye with teeth and hair? Perhaps it's both.



Russell Prather "Hair Ball," tinted acrylic medium, human hair on layers of polyester film

Teeth & Hair was on view April 7 - May 13, 2023

A Harmonious and Safe Journey of Beauty and Balance

One Saturday night – or was it Friday? I don't quite remember – a frat brother got a hold of some good shit. Later that evening at his off-campus apartment near Michigan State, a group of us then fired up a few joints and passed them all around.

Sometime later after the joints had become dead roaches, I looked across the room at clean-cut Paul (not his real name) who was seated with his feet spread apart and elbows resting upon his knees. He was hunched over as though he was doing some deep listening to the music playing in the background or musing about his place in the universe. Paul then looked up with a mildly incredulous grin and said, “Man, I'm fucked up.”

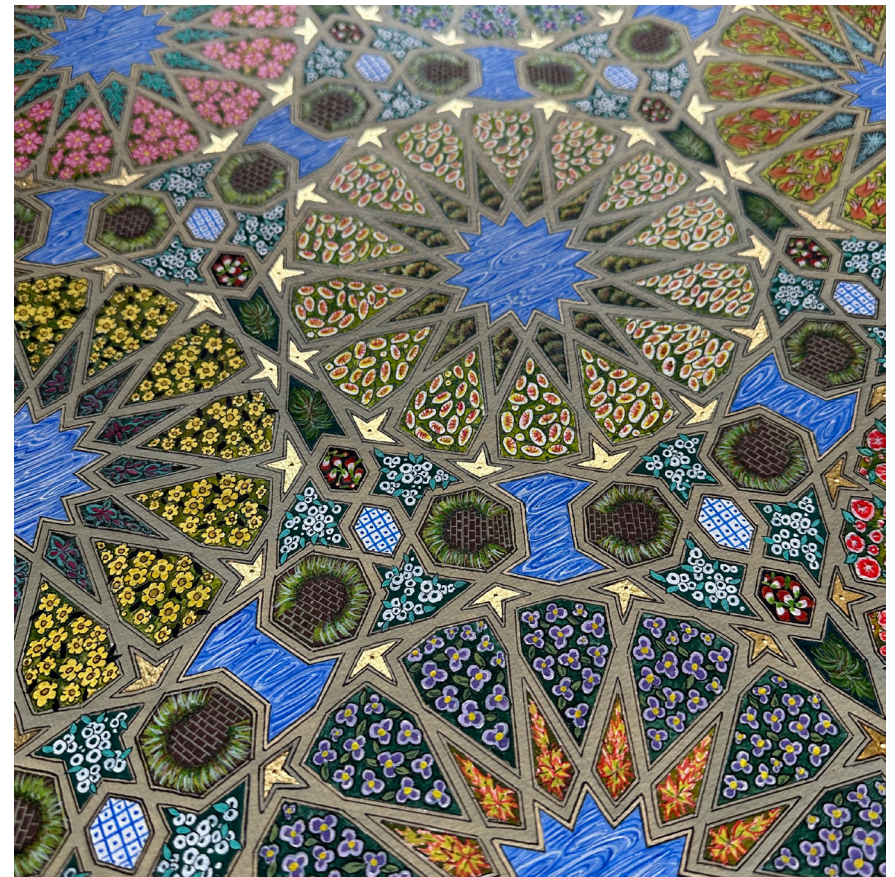
Yes. We were all fucked up. And I wondered if Paul's experience had been the same as mine, which was seeing a dazzling array of colorful shapes and Spirograph images. I had become captivated by visions of geometric and symmetric forms that had spread out before my eyes. I saw a kaleidoscope of patterns, something never before experienced with weed, and was mesmerized.

Later, other brothers shared similar visual trips and we concluded that “good shit” was probably laced with some kind of hallucinogen.

I stopped smoking weed a long time ago, but was reminded of that most peculiar experience from nearly four decades ago in viewing some of the artworks in Aisha Changezi's *Oasis of Symmetry* collection. The meticulously crafted creations of ink and watercolors on handmade khadi paper were, at times, evocative of religious architecture and other times celestial.

I read that symmetry has long captivated artists, from ancient civilizations to modern creators, as evidenced by Changezi's work. The aesthetic principle brings balance and order to artistic compositions. And for the patron there can be something else, too, as explained in the exhibition's synopsis: “While observing the structural insights of these patterns, one can ponder on their inner self and their connection with the universe.”

It's certainly a safer and healthier departure from the present than smoking somebody's weed that could be laced.



Aisha Changezi, detail of “*Firdous*,” gouache, ink & 24K gold leaf on handmade khadi paper

Oasis of Symmetry was on view May 26 - July 1, 2023

Late Stage Block Party: A carnival of disunity

Block parties are ordinarily festive, relaxing occasions that bring together neighbors and community members to celebrate unity and a sense of belonging. The mood is typically joyous where people gather for food, music and socializing, sometimes despite the challenges and struggles of daily living.

However, in the early morning of July 2, 2023, an annual block party in South Baltimore became the latest site of a mass shooting in the United States when 30 people were shot, two fatally, at the neighborhood gathering. The victims ranged in age from 13 to 32—nearly half of whom were under 18. Witnesses to the shooting and its aftermath described a horrific and chaotic scene, according to the *Washington Post*.

Still, the reaction throughout the rest of America to the Baltimore mass shooting was a collective “meh.” For far too many citizens, large-scale gun violence has become commonplace and accepted as simply another day in the life.

Consider the numbers. By early July 2023, there had been more than 330 mass in shootings in the U.S., according to the Gun Violence Archive, a nonprofit research group that tracks gun violence using police reports, news coverage and other public sources. The group, which defines a mass shooting as one in which at least four people were killed or injured, counted 647 mass shootings in 2022. Of those, 21 involved five or more fatalities.

On the basis of those statistics, it seems the words of 1960s’ Black activist H. Rap Brown have proven prescient. In a July 27, 1967, speech, Brown said: “Violence is a part of America’s culture. It is as American as cherry pie.” And for those of us sickened or, worse, traumatized by these regular servings of American “cherry pie,” the antidote is always the same: “Thoughts and prayers.”

Adrian Hatfield’s *Late Stage Block Party*, for me, reflects the blasé state-of-mind that has infected our body politic where violence—and gun violence, in particular—is concerned. In contrast to the uplifting spirit that permeates your normal street festival, Hatfield’s *Block Party* is a carnival of disunity. The collection’s 10 artworks of oils and acrylics, on canvas and linen, are a night gallery of bad and twisted dreamscapes.

To quote Nancy, star of the old comic strip of the same name, depicted in the work, titled *There will come soft rains*: “MAYBE THIS WORLD IS ANOTHER’S PLANET’S HELL.” That is to say, perhaps we are experiencing hell on earth, where thoughts and prayers are worthless.

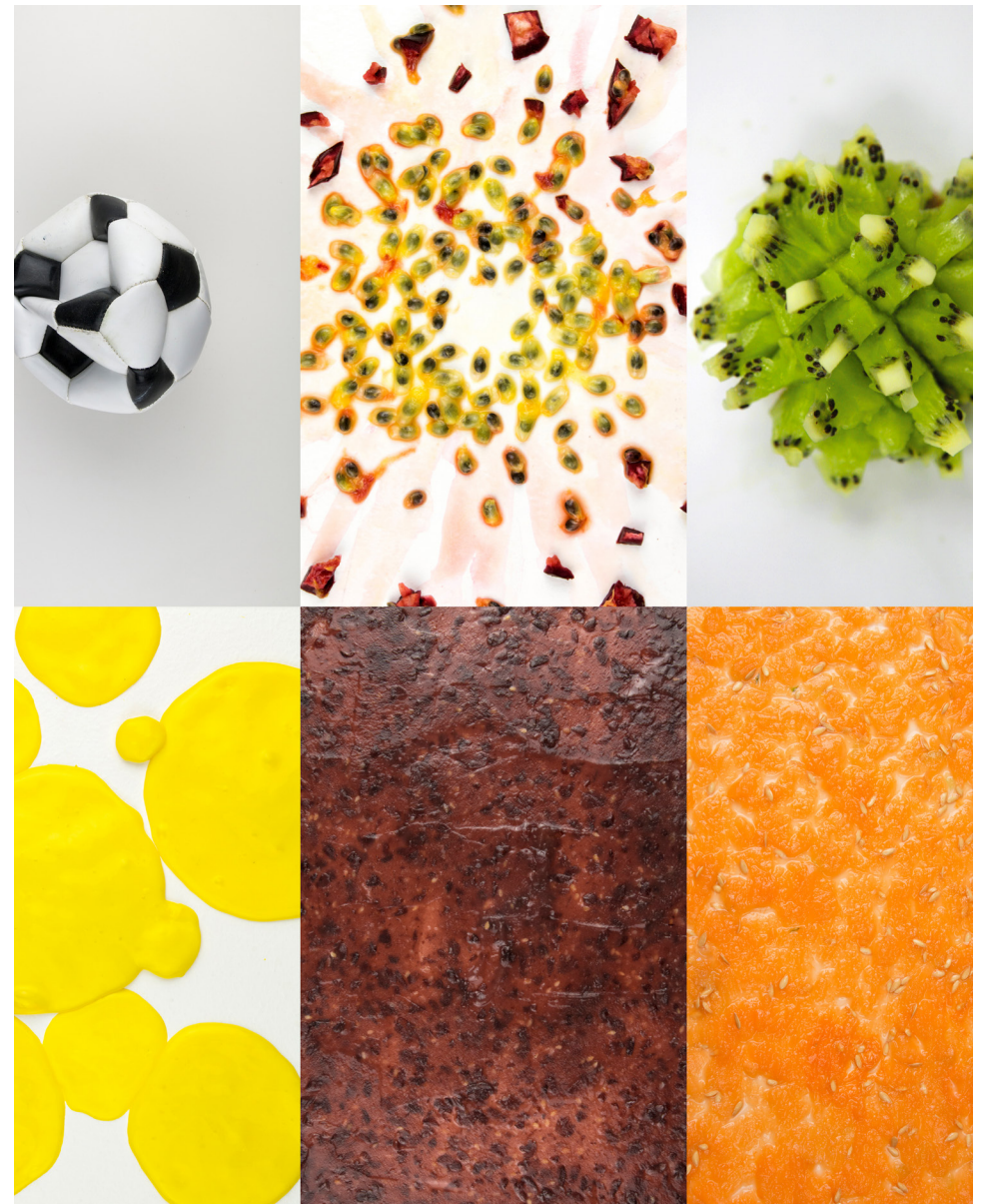
Elsewhere, other familiar faces of pop culture are present throughout the works, including a couple of buxom, doe-eyed babes that resemble Betty and Veronica of *Archie Comics* fame fused and repackaged into sex kittens.

Although the Party maybe slowly disintegrating, if not effectively over, sex-kitten Betty, standing amid the carnage depicted in *Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt*, captures the zeitgeist the period when she says, “YEAH. BUT WHAT A BOD!”



Adrian Hatfield, detail of "There will come soft rains," oil and acrylic on canvas

Late Stage Block Party was on view May 26 - July 1, 2023



Ryan Lewis, video still of "Everted Sanctuaries I - V, VII," digital stop motion video

Everted Sanctuaries: Exquisite Contortions was on view May 26 - July 1, 2023

Inside out, and round and round

Perhaps my favorite song by Marvin Gaye is his 1977 hit *Got to Give It Up*. It opens with the sound of festive voices at a party or nightclub that are soon accompanied by a mellow, mid-tempo and infectious dance beat.

Gaye's falsetto lyrics then gets right to the heart of the matter of what many-a introvert have experienced in similar settings, as they stood silently along the wall while the dance floor swelled with bodies in motion:

*I used to go out to parties
And stand around
'Cause I was too nervous
To really get down*

*But my body yearned to be free
I got on the floor and thought
'Somebody could choose me'*

Oh, if only he could ditch the shell, people would see and experience the person inside. However, transforming oneself in order to “really get down,” so to speak, usually takes far longer than the pace of a four-minute or 12-minute, for the full-length version song.

And sometimes, once the process begins, you'll be utterly surprised at what you discover after the metamorphosis is complete.

Such was the case with *Everted Sanctuaries: Exquisite Contortions*. Artist Ryan Lewis employed a series of remarkable stop-motion animated videos examining the concept of introverts becoming extroverted.

Society tends to view extroverts as the ideal personality type, for their assertiveness, sociability and confidence. Meanwhile, introverts may prefer solitude, introspection and spending time in a small circle of friends rather than in large social gatherings. Still, while introversion is a natural and valid personality trait, it can sometimes be misunderstood or undervalued in a society that often celebrates outgoing and life-of-the-party types. As a result, some introverts may feel pressure to conform to societal expectations, sometimes with embarrassing or disastrous consequences.

Other times, the transformation, however brief, is not only desirable but may yield something entirely new and exciting, as Gaye recounted.

*No more standin' there beside the walls
I done got myself together, baby
And now I'm havin' a ball
As long as you're groovin'
There's always a chance
Somebody watchin'
Might wanna make romance*

Eversion complete and exquisite, indeed.

Genie has left the bottle

In an earlier career, I wired and serviced many electrical control panels in my seven years as an electrician for AC Spark Plug. However, I cannot ever recall seeing a panel quite like the one featured in *Nature is Healing*. The unit looked like something straight out of ... *The Twilight Zone*.



Nuclear anxiety and the threat of atomic warfare was a recurring theme of the eerie science-fiction television show created and narrated by Rod Serling that aired from 1959 to 1964; the hospital-green control board resembled something that might have been used to launch atomic missiles.

By happenstance, the exhibit opened around the same time as the film *Oppenheimer*, a biopic about J. Robert Oppenheimer, who is considered the father of the United States nuclear weapons program and the atomic bomb. Atomic weapons have been used only twice in warfare in the history of humankind. (Numerous bombs were exploded for testing, however.) Bombs were dropped against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which ended the war in the Pacific Theater and the Second World War entirely.

The debate continues over whether the use of such weapons against Japan was the proper and more sanitized way to end the war. Other options on the table at the time included a naval blockade of the island and a full-scale invasion of mainland Japan.

In a 1965 interview, Oppenheimer reasoned “invading mainland Japan would involve a slaughter of Americans and Japanese on a massive scale.”

Indeed, U.S. military planners estimated that such an invasion would have cost upwards of 1 million casualties of American servicemen alone – including the number killed running into the six digits – and at least another year of combat to bring about the unconditional surrender of Japan. The casualties among the Japanese were expected to be perhaps twice as high, as women, children and the elderly were expected to join the fight in defending their homeland.

Serling as well as my father were veterans of WWII. Pvt. Serling saw ferocious combat in the Philippines while SSgt. Clarence Campbell earned his Combat Infantryman Badge for service in the mountains of Italy where he fought the Germans. Following Germany’s surrender, my father’s Army unit was slated for redeployment to the Pacific to join Serling and the hundreds of thousands of other military personnel for the planned invasion of Japan.

We’ll never know, of course (and thankfully), whether Serling or my father would have been among 1 million or more casualties had the course of human history followed a different path. However, we do know for certain the nuclear genie was let out of the bottle as a result of the path chosen.

To which Oppenheimer remarked: “[The ending of the war by \[use of the atomic bomb\] was certainly cruel and not undertaken lightly. But I am not, as of today, confident that a better course was opened.](#)”

In exploring the earth’s hypothetical recovery from an unspecified nuclear disaster in her exhibition, *Nature is Healing*, one wonders if artist Maria Lux might feel the same.

Maria Lux, detail of “Control Panel,” paint, wood and buttons

Nature is Healing was on view July 14 - August 12, 2023



(Above) Bob Campbell in front of *Nature is Healing*, solo exhibition from Maria Lux. Photo courtesy of Anthony Summers

(Right) Robert Beras, “*Dream 39*,” digital photo comp on archival paper

Nature is Healing and *In a Dream* were on view July 14 - August 12, 2023



E s c a p e

The automobiles — an assortment of dated sedans — are artifacts of a bygone era. The dwellings and industrial buildings, too.

It doesn't matter. Whether the rust belt, with its haunting hulks of shuttered factories, or the lonely domiciles of the farm belt, a sense of desolation pervades *In a Dream*, a collection of 15 photographs digitally manipulated and retouched by photographer Robert Beras.

Not anyplace I'd want to be in those pictures. Or anyone else, it seems. The series foreshadows escape.

Cars preparing to leave or simply abandoned. Escape to a desirable place; to green pastures; a simpler existence? Perhaps. Or escape from a locale loathed, spent or both?

No, not anyplace I'd want to be. And, yet I'm carried away by each scene, by each photograph, like a dream.

Let's work



Andrew Rieder, "Repair," mixed media on panel

Vocation as Vacation was on view July 14 - August 12, 2023

Luscious danced with powerful grace immediately out of the gate. Her motions were fluid, if not particularly sensual. She was a thoroughbred among erotic hoofers. This woman was born to dance, he thought. And he imagined nothing would be different, even if an audience wasn't present. She could have danced all by herself.

~ Excerpt from the novel *Motown Man*

If you love what you do, as the saying goes, you'll never work a day in your life.

Perhaps. However, one does wonder if the author of the adage was ever married or raised any children. Although you certainly love them, maintaining those relationships is also work, sometimes. Labors of love if you will.

But seriously, I get it. The quote refers to one's calling, as depicted artfully in Andrew Rieder's exhibition *Vocation as Vacation*. It's about how you choose to the extent you're able to make a living and the work's fulfillment that extends beyond a paycheck.

There can be a certain exhilaration in getting your hands dirty (i.e., doing the work), whether you're turning a screwdriver, as I did regularly in an earlier profession, or turning a phrase that I'm more apt to do today. Even though the task from start to finish may not always be vacation-easy, the satisfaction of a job well-done, or merely its completion, can be as invigorating as downing a cold bottle of beer in the shade on a scorching afternoon.

Other times, work may deliver simple pleasures of a different variety, as Luscious, the exotic dancer referenced above, would go on to explain to her would-be suitor that night at The Cabaret in *Motown Man*. Admittedly, it's a different take on the theme of Rieder's mixed-media paintings of leisurely settings that examined whether a job needs to seem undesirable to qualify as work.

But the sentiment is the same.

Mercy me

We All Live Downwind offers a visual representation of Marvin Gaye's composition Mercy Mercy Me, a mournful ballad from his 1971 magnum opus album What's Going On.

*Oh, things ain't what they used to be
What about this overcrowded land?
How much more abuse from the man can she stand?*

The lyrics, more than a half-century old, have resonance for me, as I consider among other things the unnerving impacts of climate change and plastic pollution that's ravaging our oceans and aquatic ecosystems. Meanwhile, microplastics are turning up increasingly in humans, as the compounds breakdown and find their way into our food chain and drinking water.

The exhibition of 17 prints also renders commentary on the sad state of our aged, crumbling and poorly maintained infrastructure. Perhaps none more so for Flint residents, in particular than print number two. Titled simply *Lead*, the print depicts fingers of hands belonging to Black people poking through the dirt beneath three severed water pipes, rusted and corroded inside.

The fingers differ in nail structure, skin texture and complexion, and thus appear to be the hands of at least two people (maybe more). The disturbing image suggests bodies buried beneath the debris of bad, ill-conceived decisions. Hands grasping for rescue. Hands that communicate, "[We are here.](#)"

As climate change and various environmental calamities are demonstrating, there are far fewer places to be found upwind anymore. Indeed, as the work of artist Shanna Merola illustrates, we all live downwind now.



Shanna Merola, "*Lead*," analog collage

We All Live Downwind was on view August 26 - September 30, 2023

A bedside musical

My mother loved the piano. She reveled in the beautiful, cascading melodies produced by striking the right combination of keys at the right time, whether playing as part of an orchestra, a smaller ensemble or solo.

She relished playing the piano. Even though her musicianship was only fair, she spent many afternoons seated at her Wurlitzer upright piano on which she kept stacks of sheet music. The piano was a co-centerpiece of our living room, sharing the distinction with a big, old Curtis Mathes console television. Although mama never said so, I'm certain she was a little disappointed that I never took up the piano as a child. The entertainment provided by the television set won my attention.

Mama also loved listening to the great pianists and was especially fond of the legendary bandleaders who directed their orchestras from behind the keyboard – Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Earl “Fatha” Hines, to name a few.

So, during one of my final visits to her bedside, I compiled an impromptu playlist on my iPhone of some of her favorite jazz musicians. She was in the throes of stage-four pancreatic cancer at the time and heavily sedated in hospice care. Her eyes were shut, and she could no longer speak. As I played various songs on the phone, which I had placed on the pillow beside her, mama's head began to move ever-so slowly. I noticed a slight, barely perceptible change in her facial expression. She lit up, as though she might utter her signature statement of delight; "Hey, hey, hey!"

A nurse who had observed mama's slight reawakening would remark later that mama seemed to be dancing, if only in her mind.

Mama died a few days after that bedside visit.

There had been many other bedside visits to see and care for my mama, and daddy (before her), as each battled illnesses that would eventually end their lives. Scenes like those depicted in Emily Orzech's exhibition *Beside* are burned into my memory. The countless hours spent in hospital rooms at Ascension Genesys and McLaren Flint, and nursing homes to provide understanding, care and comfort to my aged and terminal parents while trying to protect their dignity in that most fragile condition. Of Orzech's 14 works, I was most haunted by "Prognostications," a sanded screenprint on panel, that features a faint graph of *relative survival rates* plotted against *months after diagnosis*. The steep rate decline shown graphically in the first year of diagnosis hit hard as I recalled how quickly mama succumbed to pancreatic cancer.

However, I choose to focus on the bedside moments my mom and I shared in the days before her beautiful music concluded.

Emily Orzech, "Prognostications" sanded screenprint on panel

Beside was on view August 26 - September 30, 2023



My Kind of Sunstroke



An acquaintance once asked me: “Why would you go to Florida in the summertime?”

“Because,” I said, “there’s an ocean there.”

Of course, it wasn’t just the ocean that drew me. Nor was it simply the tropical temperatures or the food and drink. In fact, it isn’t necessarily Florida alone. The place could be coastal South Carolina, Jamaica, Cancun, Aruba or some destination yet to be visited.

Instead, it’s the state of mind that seems to exist in those seaside locales. Places where – depending upon my longitudinal positioning, respectively – I can watch the sun slowly and silently emerge from or sink into earth’s deep blue waters.

Another such place is Key West where I fled to in the summer after my mother’s death. She was my last surviving parent after my father had departed this world four years prior. My parents talked about visiting that string of islands off the southern tip of Florida in the mid-1950s, nearly a decade before my birth. It was there where they, along with their three young children, boarded a ferry for the 90-mile trip across of the Straits of Florida to Havana, Cuba.

Yes, Key West. My kind of place, where wild chickens run free in the streets the way squirrels do in Michigan.

Additionally, the setting usually includes a particular kind of seaside domicile or merchant shop that seems to provide just enough shelter from the region’s elements. The metallic yet soothing rhythms of steel drums and the deep, resonant tones of an electric bass guitar – music whether real or imaginary completes the soundtrack that plays in my head.

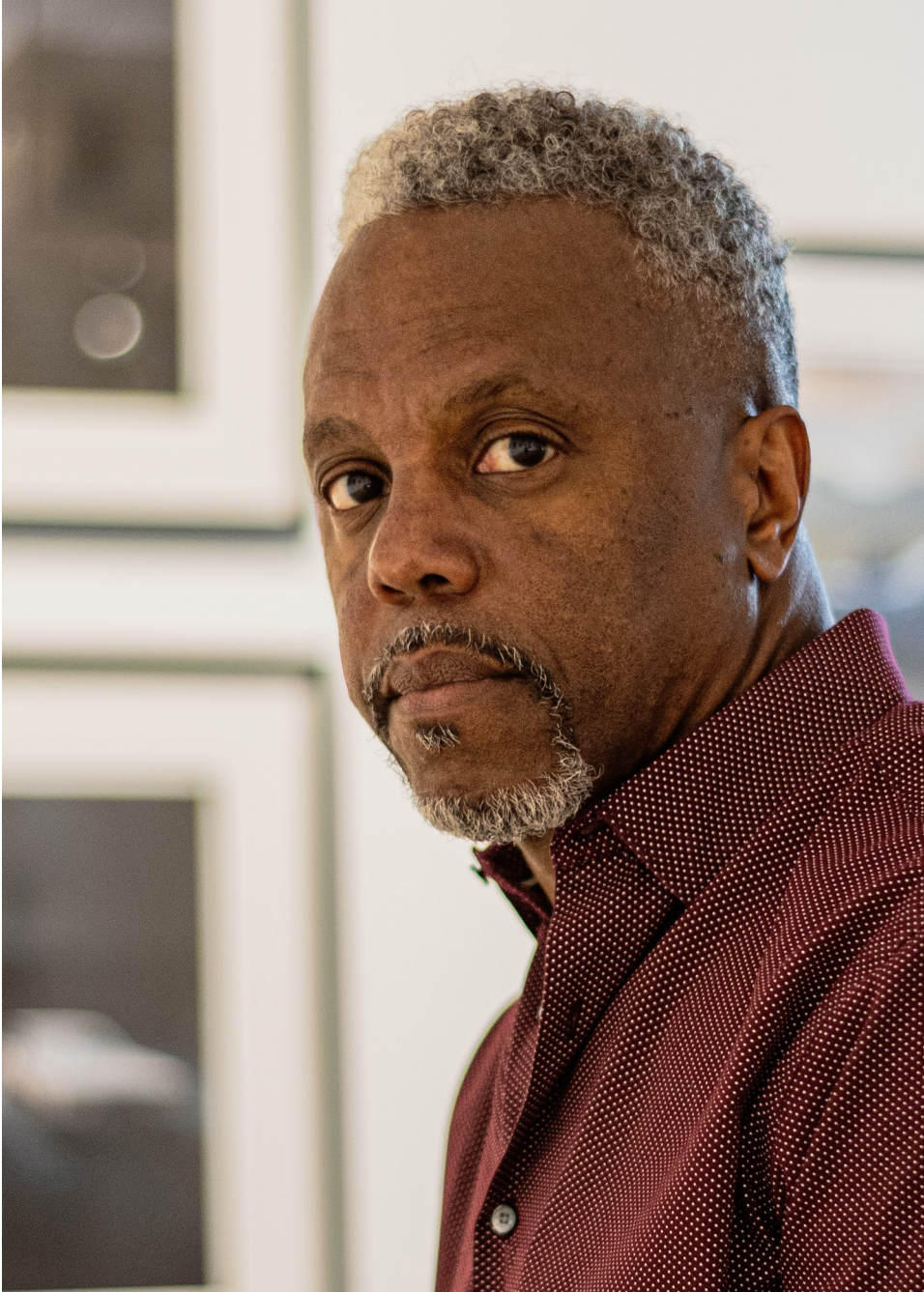
Leisurely and carefree milieus, however fleeting. For the stays never last more than a week. Ephemeral, in some ways, like life itself. But magnificent, nonetheless.

In viewing the exhibition *Sunstroke*, 18 works of various mediums by artist Denise Burge, I was far away and at ease with a cocktail in hand, appreciating the sound of waves crashing ashore, basking in the tropical paradise of my mind.

And life is good.

Denise Burge, “Pablo 2,” Fabric, embroidery, paint

Sunstroke was on view August 26 - September 30, 2023



Bob Campbell is a local writer who was born and raised in Flint. His debut novel, *Motown Man*, was published in November 2020 by Urban Farmhouse Press.

Bob's creative nonfiction, essays and novel excerpts have appeared in Michigan Quarterly Review, Belt Magazine, Forge Literary Magazine, Hypertext Magazine, All Write in Sin City (podcast) and Gravel Magazine. He is a contributor to Belt Publishing's Midwest Architecture Journeys, published in October 2019. He is also a contributor to We Poke Along Writers Project (wepokealong.umich.edu), inspired by the Depression-era state guides written and published under the auspices of the Federal Writers' Project, a program initiated by the Roosevelt administration's Works Project Administration.

Bob was a staff writer for the Flint Journal, Lexington Herald-Leader and Detroit Free Press. He was an electrician at AC Spark Plug for seven years before moving into journalism. He is currently manager of marketing and communications for Mott Community College.

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ABOUT BUCKHAM GALLERY

It is the mission of Buckham Gallery to enrich the cultural life of its surrounding communities by presenting a broad range of innovative contemporary art, both visual and performance, of the highest quality and standard.

Buckham Gallery is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization located in downtown Flint, Michigan. The gallery has been an anchor of the Flint art community since its inception in 1984. Founded by a collective of area artists, arts professors, and arts professionals, gallery operations, exhibitions, and programming continue to be led by artists and arts professionals.

For more information about Buckham Fine Arts Project and the Writer in Residence program, please visit www.buckhamgallery.org

“The yearlong
Writer In Residence
experience was
delightfully
uncomfortable from
the very beginning. .

. .with each fresh
collection, my
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