

MV TIMES

AUGUST 22, 2018

Featherstone celebrates 'The Beautiful Difference' in latest exhibit

by Gwyn McAllister



The beautiful Difference exhibit at Featherstone - David Welch

The current show hanging at the Francine Kelly Gallery in the Art Barn at Featherstone represents something quite different for the arts organization. As opposed to local artists, the participants are all from off-Island. The show's title, "The Beautiful Difference," refers to the selection of artists included in the show. All are of African descent, representing African Americans and individuals from Europe and elsewhere.

"Nonwhite artists and women are under-represented in the art world," says the show's curator, Sandra Grymes. In order to address this disparity, Ann Smith, Featherstone executive director, asked Grymes to draw from her circle of friends and associates in the art world to put together the current show.

The 20-plus artists included represent a variety of media — painting, drawing, photography, mixed media, and sculpture, and includes artists in various stages of their careers. There are also works on loan by master artists now deceased — including Loïs Mailou Jones, Romare Bearden, and Al Loving.

Splitting her time between Harlem, N.Y. and Oak Bluffs, Grymes has developed numerous connections in the national and international art scene. "I have always been involved in arts and culture," she says. "I've been a part of the black arts and culture community in New York for years."

In curating the show, Grymes reached out to her many colleagues in the art world — gallery owners, curators, and art historians — for recommendations. She also recruited artists whom she knows personally. Grymes has been on the board of the Studio Museum of Harlem for decades. According to their website, "The Studio Museum in Harlem is the

nexus for artists of African descent locally, nationally, and internationally, and for work that has been inspired and influenced by black culture.”

The “Beautiful” part of the title is obvious when one walks into the spacious gallery. “When people walk in the room, you can see them brighten up,” says Grymes. “It’s very bright and beautiful. It’s a beautifully hung show.”

Some of the most colorful pieces are by Maria Lana Queen, whose bright, eye-popping ripped paper collages really jump out at the viewer. Queen, a D.C. native, is also showing two other large works — diptychs done with acrylic and oil stick on paper, featuring numbers — something that the artist uses quite frequently in her work.

Another artist who takes full advantage of color and form is abstract artist and printmaker Joyce Wellman, whose work has a childlike quality with lots of energy. Swirls, scribbles, and distorted geometric shapes give her work a playful, kinetic feel.

Lisa Corinne Davis creates very interesting, almost architectural or cartographical images, using ink and acrylics. The titles of the pieces — “Chimeric Computation,” “Phantasmal Prototype” — give an idea of the artist’s scientific approach to her work. Davis’ work can be found in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

By layering photos, found images and more, mixed-media artist Stan Squirewell builds up wonderfully complex collages featuring embellished busts, while the late Sam Middleton relied on abstraction, line, and color to create beautiful collages inspired by music. One of the most interesting pieces in the show is a three-dimensional collage by Squirewell called “Transatlantic,” which features swirls and grids created with tubing, mesh, and springs and is painted a metallic grey.

Photography is well represented in the show. Adger Cowans, whose work is included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, International Museum of Photography, and the Museum of Modern Art, among others, has contributed to the show a number of his black-and-white portraits. Stevie Wonder, Mohammed Ali, Mick Jagger, and Diahann Carroll are among the famous subjects represented in the selection.

In a completely different vein, John Pinderhughes’ color archival pigment prints from a series titled “Quiet Scripture” obscure and abstract images from nature to stunning effect.

Sculpture by Thaddeus Mosley adds another dimension to the collection. His large wooden pieces occupy center stage in the gallery. The most eye-catching is a tall totem, carved and split vertically.

The exhibition statement for “The Beautiful Difference” outlines the theme of the show: “Disparate in style yet unified by the variance that is blackness, freed from a fixed racial position and open to the complexities of life, each work of art in this exhibition reflects what makes blackness the beautiful difference.”