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VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

"Don't judge a book by its cover. This ever-popular phrase we all learned at a young age is relevant not only to every day life, but also to everyday art. When attending the Emeriti Faculty Art Exhibit at the University of Wisconsin- River Falls, I came in contact with many different genres of art. Some caught my undivided attention; others I didn't even give a second glance. Then this phrase popped into my head and I decided to vanquish my biases and give all of the featured pieces an equal chance.

Each of the faculty members in this exhibit has a different style and way of approaching art, which shows through in their artistic renderings. There is so much variety among the different artists, but also within each artist's work. Whether it is the media used between the varying pieces of work or just the unique character, all the works prove that "variety is the spice of life."

Mary Barrett is one of the featured artists whose Canyon Series caught my attention from the very beginning. This series is all done in the medium of wood-cut collage with encaustic.

Each collage piece was like a puzzle; all seemingly created on their own and pieced together. They create an art work that pops out at your eye and adds depth and texture. One of the Canyon Series featured rough and coarse mountains created with strong, zebra-like black lines drawn over rich chocolaty browns and tans. The sky overlooking the canyon tops is smooth and well blended. An underlying broad straight line is drawn across the bottom in clay-like brown color. This line represents the contrast between the rough canyons and the smooth flowing ground of dirt and sand below them. One other Canyon Series piece that caught my eye didn't remind me of a canyon, but rather of a field. The bright blue sky, vibrant green land, and gold "stalk" are what make the piece. Not only because of their uniqueness compared to the two other Canyon Series, but also because of the change of scenery. The sandy ground underlying the field seems to lead your eye to the vast blend of soft blue and majestic purple mountains in the background. This piece has a vast contrast between the smooth shaded mountains, creamy sky and sandy land, and the irregular jagged-ness of the intense fields.

Mary Barrett also has a piece that did not catch my eye to begin with, but I decided to look deeper into and try to understand the connection to her other pieces. This was the first piece I came to in the exhibit. It was entitled Stone-Bone Landscape. Stone-Bone Landscape was done in dry pigment with

drawing combined. This piece of work has a realistic resemblance of ivory pieces of bone pieced together in a mirror image of the opposing side- a pile of smooth, tan rocks. The eye is first drawn to the blood red color underlying the pile of shadowed, yet smooth chunks of bone. The black and white contrast added to the bright, yet eerie reds startled me, but made me look for a comparison between the two sides separated by an almost too straight of a thin black line for this piece. The mirror imaged side details a pile of beige, textured stones, in an almost cave-like setting. Both sides didn't seem to go together until I thought about the darkness, the emptiness, the plain simplicity, yet the detailed crevices and curves of both sides which show how two totally different things fit so well side by side; not only because of the images that they portray, but also because of the meaning behind them. All of Mary Barrett's pieces of work caught my attention in some form or another and I soon found that they all had to deal with the contrast between the elements portrayed throughout each piece.

Another artist's work that was featured was Patricia Clark whose main focal point was that of landscape. One of her pieces was entitled Landscape Tokens/Chaco Canyon. In this piece, a canyon is constructed in neutral colors, but is not the main focal point of our attention. What draws the viewer to the piece is the smaller pieces underlying the landscape. These are the

Missing Piece[s] of Land (another work of art by Clark) which makes up the entire work as a whole. Not because of their interest, but literally they are what make up the piece. These models represent what makes up the land around the world. Their shapes are drawn into the canyon, and the 3D pieces that make up that part of the land are placed below. The models are each brightly colored and layered with a textured roughness to represent the realistic life pieces. I admired this piece because of the bright colors, textures and the fact that it was in a sense educational in the fact that it wasn't just a drawing; it incorporated models that were able to present to the viewer what the entire piece was about; Landscape Tokens of the Chaco Canyon.

Another rendering by Clark, which was by far the piece that most caught my eye from the very beginning was entitled Landscape Investigation- East Meets West. A black and white shaded composite of textured hay or slivers of wood chunks. To me it was hard to understand what the pieces were, but when I thought of the "wild west" these were the images that came to mind- the irregularity of the desert land. The most intriguing part of this painting is the thin border done in cool colors around the outer edge of the piece. Although the whole painting seems to be fairly detailed, the added color seems to be

more so. All of the pieces of the painting come together and blend into each other perfectly. Not one piece of the center "western-like land" is left alone and stopped abruptly. The trees and birds in the piece add a more realistic effect. The specific line pattern for each part and piece of land shows great depth and texture. The method of swirling and scraping in the dull gray sky shows a distinction between the calmness of the sky and the ruggedness of the terrain. To me the black and white colors of the piece represent the west and the bright colors in the border represent the east. The west being old fashioned and the east encompassing the new and different styles of living. As with the other pieces featured in this exhibit, I think all are connected by the contrast between the artists featured and the contrast within each artists work.

Clark seems to embed in her art the simple colors of black and white and of the plain beiges but to contrast these "boring" colors with energetic, upbeat, and vibrant colors. It's not the simplicity of the piece that catches the viewers eye, but rather that of the complexity behind it. Her creations change our visions and "critically examine the transient nature of the landscape images." Her pieces show the importance of our surroundings and the importance of looking beyond the "materiality" of her work and looking deeper into to it to gain a better understanding of the world around us.

One other piece of work that caught my eye was China-Ming, a mixed media rendering created by Jim Crane. This piece greatly differs from what Jim Crane considers to be his usual medium-computer imaging but is by far much more interesting to me because of the contrast between what seems to be a new approach to the way he used to create things. This art work encompassed almost every possible media imaginable: ink, objects, paint, fabric, and list can go on. When walking by this for the first time, I admit I almost walked right on by until a small blue jewel sparkling in the center of the work stopped me. This is meant to serve as the focal point of the piece. The textures in China-Ming hit all spectrums- the coarse hardness of the layered objects but the smooth surface of the fabric and paint. A hardly noticeable snake emblem is drawn in black ink above the jewel. The great detail of the snake keeps the viewer interested and becomes one of the main focuses of the work once the viewer looks deeper into the piece and realizes that it is camouflaged in the background. Many colors are present in this piece: bright greens and blues, dark purples and blacks, small amounts of red splotches, and practically every other color in some way, shape, or form are visible to the trained eye. The vibrant colors are amazing and the more you look at this piece, the more colors you can see; all blended together to form a new array of colors, yet are separate enough from each other that no two colors appear to

be the same. The meaning behind this work is unclear to me, but what it comprises makes up its own unique characteristic style of art.

The last artist that I choose to talk about is William Ammerman. All of his pieces were done in watercolors, which from my own experience are hard to not only work with, but to create a piece that relays the images you were going for. Light Lunch has loud yet translucent bright yellow and orange flowers with avocado green stems. The smooth texture lets the piece flow and gives the flowers a soft texture and realistic appeal. When analyzing this painting, my eye was drawn to the small, yet detailed bee, flying around the flower blooms. I finally understood the meaning behind the name Light Lunch. I was drawn to this piece because of the simplicity yet realism that stood out to me through the use of vibrant colors and through ordinary life objects that we are all familiar with and understand. The next piece of work by William Ammerman that also had my undivided attention was I Wisconsin Icon. I'm not from Wisconsin, but it fit the stereotype of "farmland country" which comes to mind when thinking about what Wisconsin is really about to an outsider. This watercolor is not detailed – just plain and simple features and shapes of a barn, silo, and field, but the bright reds, greens, and blues stand out to the viewer. There are many shades and tints of the same colors that give

it more depth in its appearance. Everything is well-blended and the effect of scraping is seen throughout which adds to the textural appeal of the painting. All of William Ammerman's pieces are engaged in simplicity, but because of his universally known objects aft& we can relate his pieces to our own lives and our own experiences.

When writing this paper, it finally came to my attention that most of the pieces that I chose to talk about had to do with our surroundings; whether the images be familiar to us (Bill Ammerman's Light Lunch and Wisconsin Icon) or just figments of our imagination and the way we expect them to be (Patricia Clark's Landscape Investigation East Meets West and Mary Barrett's Canyon Series).

All of the pieces in the whole Emeriti Exhibit may not catch everyone's attention, but they all have their own unique appeal to different people. Each artist I chose to talk about had a different approach to not only their work as a whole compared to the other artists, but also among the varying stylistic approaches to their own pieces. The color choices, textures, and the mediums used all encompass the visual elements that appeal to the viewer: space, light/value, line usage, varying shapes and forms, a wide spectrum of colors, and varieties of textures and patterns. They also meet the design principles of unity and variety, balance, contrast, and

repetition and rhythm. All of these features combine to help us to analyze and relate to these different genres of work. Once you give different pieces of work a chance, you are able to determine that "variety is indeed the spice of life" and you are able to appreciate the work as a whole, even if you don't necessarily understand the meaning behind it. The Emeriti Faculty Exhibit proves that you can't judge "Art by its cover," so to speak.