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When the cover of a book becomes postcard art: Captivating messages in surprising packages

By LEAH OLLMAN AUG 03, 2018

"Through-Line: Drawing and Weaving by 19 Artists" at the Steve Turner gallery brims with small gems and large wonders.

Not everything in the show reinforces the profound connections between line, language, image and weave, but the sampling is rich and varied — materially, conceptually and geographically. Half the artists are based in L.A.; the rest come from the East Coast, Canada, Argentina and Colombia.

Consider two fabulous letters that hang in the show, one that actually passed through the postal system and another that noodles with time, voice, space and stance. Mitsuko Brooks wrote to the gallerist, in pencil, on the detached inside cover of a library book, plastering the outside with a patchwork of stamps. The piece functions as a postcard, linking not only artist and dealer but also the traditions of mail art, collage and assemblage. Personal and humble, this is text messaging at its anachronistic best.

The other letter, signed William Shakespeare, was embroidered by Simon Evans to resemble a handwritten note on a yellow legal pad. It adopts the voice of a needy trickster. Addressed "Dear Future," it begins with, "I am dead" and closes with, "I hope I hope I hope I fit into the bias of your era." In between, the letter describes the author's time ("scary") but speaks with postmodern self-reflexivity from the present, referring to the letter as a picture, and noting, by way of endorsement, that "it was in an art show" — exactly where we now see/read it.

Two other standouts in the realm of fiber include Diedrick Brackens's "a field to frolic," a scrappy, spirited composition of woven yarn and cotton panels in ebullient green, pink, acid yellow, red and orange, and Kyung Me's exquisite axonometric ink drawing on silk, a dense fantasia of motifs borrowed from Japanese scroll painting.



Robyn O'Neil "Low American Grace" 2018 graphite on paper 50 x 95 inches (Heather Rasmussen)

Robyn O'Neil's "Low American Grace" is a drawing by medium (graphite) and a weaving by disposition, a montage of image and word, micro and macro, violence, absurdity and poetry. It's captivating. Within an expansive vista of distant peaks and brooding sky, O'Neil has dropped a scattering of vignettes, diaristic jottings and art historical quotations — a horse and bull from Picasso's "Guernica," a tiny scene labeled "Monks Waltzing," a recipe for "Wacky Cake," Tiger Woods' ear, a cyclone, a rainbow, a dark half moon that beckons like an escape hatch. It's landscape as mindscape, and vice versa.

Steve Turner, 6830 Santa Monica Blvd., L.A. Through Aug. 25; closed Sundays and Mondays. (323) 460-6830, www.steveturner.la