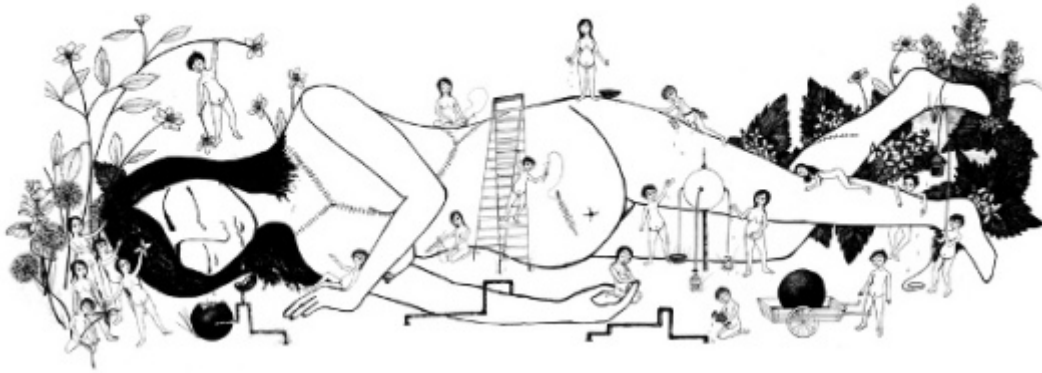


# dcist

## *Academy 2007 @ Conner Contemporary*

July 9, 2007



*Academy 2007*, at Conner Contemporary Art, is the gallery's seventh invitational survey designed to give wider exposure to recent graduates of the area's university level fine art programs. Jamie Smith, a product of formal art academia herself, curated the show along with Karyn Miller and chose the pieces after attending area BFA/MFA exhibitions between January and June. The show is designed not only as a platform for talented artists, but also as a profile of area art programs with pieces reflecting the personality and culture of their respective institutions. The result is an exhibition of 32 pieces, by 15 up-and-coming artists, in varied media ranging from painting, video, sculpture, and photography. As one might expect, the majority of the artists come from formal art programs rather than local universities. Of the 15 artists, seven come from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and three come from the Corcoran College of Art + Design.

The standout artist, and also the most represented, is MICA graduate Christina Most, who has seven pieces on display. Her *Lady Restoration* (pictured above), a drawing of lilliputian workers repairing a wounded woman, is the most impressive in a series of mythical ink on paper drawings that have a South Asian or Southeast Asian feel to them. The pieces seem to tell a cyclical story of life, death, and rebirth from a feminine point of view. Most's *Lady Shrine* colorfully reproduces some of these drawings and mounts them on a wooden structure that is at once a miniature home and house of worship that symbolizes the deference women should receive. Most's collection presents clear imagery but also invites us to imagine our own connections between the pieces. This guided active participation is what makes the work so affecting.

*Image courtesy of Conner Contemporary Art; copyright Christina Most.*

*Academy 2007* also boasts some very challenging pieces that draw an immediate and strong, though necessarily positive, reaction. Tiffany Mielcarek shows impressive artistic skill through two lightbox transparencies depicting ghoulish faces that are arresting, but reminiscent of a nightmare. Natalia Panfile's *Pretty Girl*, one of three video pieces centered around identity and religiosity, shows a woman slowly revealing her nude body by eating pieces of flesh-like covering, all while telling a disturbing story.



There are a few notable three dimensional pieces in the exhibition. Graham Childs' contribution is a series of altered baseball cards. Using material as varied as thread and gold leaf, Childs transformed these ubiquitous collectibles into items that do not seem at all out of place in a fine art gallery. Jodi Lieburn's installation, *From Here to There, From Here to Where*, which resembles a miniature movie set that is still under construction, utilizes its space well and has a reflective quality about it.

Painters are well represented and their work is, in terms of medium, the show's strongest. Deborah Rock's landscape, *August 2005 #4* makes bold use of autumn colors in the same way that an artist such as J.M.W. Turner used natural colors to great effect. *Animal Lover* and *Self Sacrifice* by Nathaniel Rodgers are two paintings Norman Rockwell might have done, had he ever tripped on acid. The characters in the pieces, people and animals, are in seemingly humane and nurturing positions with one another but the presence of butcher knives leads us to wonder if this will continue. Two abstract paintings by Magnolia Laurie juxtapose sharp geometric shapes with hazy and formless backdrops. The strong lines give structure to an otherwise languid vision and the result is quite stimulating. The most eye catching painting, but also the least abstract and demanding, is Olivia Wolfe's *M Street ATM* (pictured right). Its image is a familiar one we have all seen in other media, whether it be film or photography, but seeing it as a painting causes the viewer to pause and take notice.

*Image courtesy of Conner Contemporary Art, copyright Olivia Wolfe*

*Conner Contemporary Art is located at 1730 Connecticut Ave., NW (2nd floor) and is open Tuesday through Saturday from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Academy 2007 runs through August 18.*

Posted by Sriram Gopal