

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

WMU art center opens with strong alumni show

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By ROGER GREEN

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KALAMAZOO – Western Michigan University inaugurates its handsome new art center in splendid, aptly named style. A "Distinguished Alumni Exhibition" is the opening attraction at the James W. and Lois I. Richmond Center for Visual Arts. Artists included in the group exhibit are a distinguished group indeed. Continuing through April 7, the exhibit brings together works by graduates Mary Hatch, Mary King, Michael Souter and Tom Lollar. Working in different media while pursuing different expressive goals, the artists are fundamentally unlike. But they share inventiveness and technical skill that should do their former instructors and WMU proud.

It's true that Hatch, Souter and King make the human figure their subject; only Lollar avoids it. Yet each of the figural artists examines men, women and sometimes children from a different point of view.

Hatch is showing inkjet prints and oil paintings of figures in ambiguous, narrative situations. The latter differ opportunely from paintings she's exhibited in the past, in that brushwork is looser and more suggestive, contours often less precise. This treatment invests the paintings with dreamy vagueness appropriate to their puzzling but engaging scenarios. In "The Messenger," a young girl in a white, tulle dress approaches a man and woman. In "Francisco's World," masked guests at a party are attired in evening dress; one guest strides through the scene on stilts.

King has on view drawings executed in combinations of watercolor, acrylic, pencil and marker. Stylistically, they're faux-naïve and childlike, often distinguished by a nervous, descriptive line. Yet the drawings' apparent innocence is misleading, since King's subjects frequently are perverse and dark. In "Daddy Goes Hunting" a male figure clutches what might be a female figure's corpse; the composition is overlaid with a grid of red dots that may signify blood. "Mishap by the Sea," colored in deceptively sweet nursery hues, portrays a gigantic fish seemingly eating a standing figure.

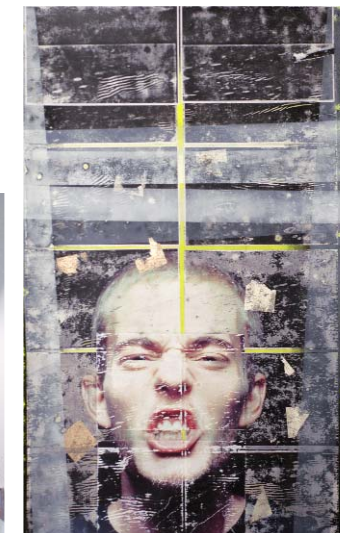
Souter's works are technically more ambitious. They're big, mixed-media pieces consisting of photo transfers that have been abraded with a belt sander, then cut up and collaged. Literature at the gallery credits the works' construction to a layering of lifetime experiences. In fact, Souter's portrayals of figures penetrate more than layer on, probing and exposing states of consciousness and being. As collaged, some of Souter's elongated nudes seem, inadvertently perhaps, to have been crucified. For plumbing psychology, his two most persuasive works are frontal views of heads, "Avowed Autodidact" and "Single Mindedness."



The exhibit's remaining artist, Tom Lollar, addresses not people but place – specifically, ancient Rome as revealed in the Severan Marble Plan, a detailed map of the city created in the third century A.D. Today, about 10 percent of the marble map survives in the form of fragments Lollar paraphrases in thoughtful, three- and two-dimensional works. Some are bas relief-sculptures of incised ceramic or marble. Others are drawings of opaque, yellow-ochre fragments, combined with schematic, linear indications of surrounding buildings and streets. Often, frontal and aerial views are juxtaposed.

Lollar's vision, sweeping 360 degrees to include geography, architecture and passing time, calls attention to the many points of view represented in the show. Artists' insights come from multiple perspectives at the new Richmond Center. Viewers can anticipate multidimensional rewards.

IF YOU GO: The James W. and Lois I. Richmond Center for Visual Arts is located at the heart of Western Michigan University's Kalamazoo campus, close by Miller Auditorium. Hours are: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday; and noon to 6 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call (269) 387-2455 or access www.wmich.edu.



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