



"Honkyoku" is among the monotypes by Bridget Fischer on display in San Jose.

Friendships frame exhibit by teachers at Art Object Gallery

By Jack Fischer
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Art Object Gallery

It's the teachers' turn this month at the Art Object Gallery in San Jose, where a half-dozen old friends -- five of whom have taught art at area colleges -- share a group show of prints, sculpture and ceramics.

The show was jointly curated by Eileen Hill, who teaches drawing and printmaking at Mission College, and long-time friend David Ogle, who is head of sculpture and ceramics at West Valley Community College.

Art Object is a mostly-not-for-profit gallery that sculptor Ken Matsumoto runs in extra space at his Japantown studio. It frequently features the work of friends -- and friends of friends -- in its nicely appointed 1,500 square feet.

Since this untitled group show bears that pedigree, no one is making any thematic claims about why the work should be shown together.

But friends do find one another for a reason, and if there's a thread that runs through much of the art here, it's that the artists demonstrate a particular love of process and involvement with their materials.

All this has made for a show that may offer not the cutting edge but something just as valuable: the work of veteran artists who have persevered in their craft for the sheer love and growing mastery of it, well past the blandishments of fame and fortune.

Hill's diptych and single panel chine collé monotypes reflect her years of experimentation with the form, and she knowingly deploys ink and applies paper to conjure elusive scenes suggestive of empty rooms and silhouettes of houses. Others have marks that carry a faintly and mystically Eastern aura.

David Kuraoka, a professor of art and head of the ceramics department at San Francisco State University, shares small-scale pit-fired ceramic sculptures, some in shapes like a giant's molars, and ceramic wall hangings. In Kuraoka's masterful hands, the pit firing -- in which the colors are achieved by the venting of gases from metal at high temperature -- achieve hues of unexpected subtlety. In wall hangings like "Moonlight Shadows," Kuraoka teases forth skeins of carbon that might have been formed deep within the earth.

"You always have to give it up to the fire in the end," says Ogle, speaking of both Kuraoka's work and his own, which is sagger fired, a process that employs a closed container, rather than an open pit. "It has the final say."

Ogle's bronzes in the show owe a debt to Alberto Giacometti's elongated, roughly surfaced figures, but with a contemporary twist. One typical one has both a shape appropriated from a plastic doll's torso and a small wall at the base that resemble the sort of corrugated metal wall you might find covering a window in a tough neighborhood.

David Bottini, who for many years taught sculpture at California State University-Fresno and colleges in Northern California, creates small-scale welded-steel sculptures that he shapes and colors to seem almost like collage paper or occasionally even cloth. Bottini's work is a sort of sleight of hand: sculpture as painting, metal as other material and heaviness made light.

Norma Lewis, at 77 the oldest friend in the show, is also the only one

who hasn't had a career teaching art. Her small, pleasingly rounded bronzes evoke the high modernism of Henry Moore in a tiny scale but give that work a decidedly American twist with shapes reminiscent of stylized animals from American Indian art. Lewis' surfaces are a marvel -- bronze finished with a patina that makes them resemble a fine, dark marble.

Finally, Bridget Fischer, an associate professor of art and gallery director at Skyline College, is showing monotypes inspired by the study of the Japanese bamboo flute, or *shakuhachi*, a tool for Zen Buddhist meditation and for playing traditional Japanese folk music. Fischer describes her art as meditative tool, ``a means to being present in the moment."

Certainly, if their work is any indication, that gift for being alive to the present is something else this group of old friends shares.

The Art Object Gallery

What: Work by David Ogle, Eileen Hill, David Kuraoka, David Bottini, Norma Lewis and Bridget Fischer

Where: 592 N. Fifth St., San Jose

When: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, but call to be sure the gallery is open

Through: July 13.

Admission: Free

Information: (408) 288-9305.

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