

Meet 'friends' at Meeting House Gallery



The Meeting House Gallery exhibit titled "Friends" includes "Buffalo in Field" by Julia Smith. (Courtesy Photo)

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One of the nice things about hanging out with “Friends” is that this five-artist exhibit at the Meeting House Gallery gives each of these artists plenty of wall space in which to display multiple examples of their work. You really feel like you get to know their individual artistic styles as you make your way around the gallery.

If you find yourself lingering before much of the work, it’s frequently because artists have a knack for making you take a look at subjects that all too often only merit a quick glance when encountered for real during our busy daily lives. Debra Halprin’s acrylic painting ‘Red Radishes,’ for instance, is a tightly-cropped depiction of a pile of radishes similar to what you would find in a supermarket produce section. Halprin’s color choices are subtle here, and so you may find yourself looking at all of the variations of red, purple and white to be found in these humble vegetables. Also, the radish greens become an all-over green zone filling the background of the painting. Similarly, Halprin’s liquid acrylic “Peppers” is a closely-observed gathering of red, orange and yellow peppers.

Halprin usually opts for densely clustered items in her compositions, but she takes a different approach in her watercolor “Molly’s Flowers.” The flowers themselves have been reduced to simplified, clearly-outlined floral forms that are set against the otherwise bare white paper.

For some more flowers, have a look at Donna Golden’s acrylic painting “Wildflowers.” They’re shown profusely growing in a field. You may be able to make out specific floral varieties, but the overall impression is of vividly-colored upright stalks set against a pale green background.

Golden’s varied subject matter here also includes human subjects. An acrylic painting that is sure to make you smile is “We Play for Tips.” It depicts seven musicians gathered on an outdoors bench. Judging from instruments including a trombone, tuba and trumpet, they seem fully capable to making a brassy sound to please the ears. The artist does not allow much else into the picture, meaning you really think about the happy music being made around that bench.

The human presence is strongly implied in Julie Smith’s acrylic painting “Storyteller,” which presents a junked-old car. Its raised hood makes you wonder whether somebody wanted to have a final inspection of an antique car. Then again, maybe somebody just wanted to salvage what they could from this junker. In any event, your imagination is encouraged to ponder such narrative possibilities. On a stylistic level, the artist introduces a bit of purple into what remains of the car’s white finish.

Smith’s application of unexpected colors goes much further in two acrylic paintings, “Young Warrior” and “Moving On,” which amount to portraits of bison. Besides the expected shades of brown in their furry sides, there are bits of purple, blue and green worked into their fur. The bison are backed by an indistinct landscape consisting of melting greens and yellows. Even if you aren’t entirely convinced by some of the color choices in these bison portraits, you’re given reason to pause and consider how artists often respond to natural subjects in a highly-personalized manner. In other words, we look at the same things and yet don’t necessarily see them in the same way.

Among the most versatile artists in this exhibit, Smith also has mixed-media collages that are abstractions containing allusions to nature. In “Spring Fling,” there are bursts of red and orange placed atop a vase-evocative form; and in “Sun Storm,” a yellow orb is complemented by orange zones elsewhere in the composition.

Another versatile artist is Pamela Gordimer, whose subjects range from relatively straightforward realism to more overtly symbolic subject matter. Gordimer’s oil painting “Girl and Horse” places them in a flower-filled field. The young woman, who wears a brightly patterned dress, reaches down to pick flowers; and the horse also bends down to graze in the grass. They definitely seem to be harmoniously sharing this field.

If that painting is very much taking place in a field, Gordimer’s oil painting “Milky Way Dreams” aims higher for its subject. There is a rocky landscape anchoring this composition, but the real center of attention is the northern lights-type green glow illuminating the night sky. That nocturnal sky also has tiny spots of illumination from numerous stars that collectively do seem rather dreamy.

Unlike the other artists who are making paintings, watercolors and collages, Gale L. Bell has small sculptures made from such materials as clay, alabaster and soapstone. Most of these sculptures are figurative abstractions that take the human form down to its essence. In the salmon alabaster “Mother and Child,” those figures stand so close together that they verge on becoming a single curving shape.

“Friends” runs through Jan. 27 at the Meeting House Gallery, in the Oakland Mills Interfaith Center at 5885 Robert Oliver Place in Columbia. Call 410-730-4090 or go to themeetinghouse.org/art-gallery

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