

Poetic, deeply personal works

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"Deep South" was the show stealer at Colin O'Con's Philadelphia debut exhibition at Automat, 319 N. 11th St. The show was cut short by a building fire.

Now in its 91st year, the Philadelphia Print Center's Annual International Competition remains one of the country's most esteemed art competitions. In February, this year's jurors - Kelly Baum, curator of contemporary art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and her colleague Jennifer Farrell, the Met's associate curator of drawings and prints - chose 11 finalists from 400 applicants, three of whom were awarded solo exhibitions to be organized by the Print Center's curator, John Caperton.

The three talented winners are Korean artist Yoonmi Nam (a faculty member at the University of Kansas, Lawrence), TR Ericsson of Brooklyn (he also works out of Painesville, Ohio), and Philadelphia's Serena Perrone. Their exhibitions, on view now, are notably quiet, poetic shows of deeply personal work. The world's woes seem far away.

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The hush begins with Nam's exhibition in the Print Center's ground-floor gallery, where she's showing two bodies of work that explore ephemerality and permanence.

Her woodblock prints depict simple line drawings of disposable containers that hold arrangements of flowers. They're whimsical and sweet.

Her other collection, her "objects," are more ironic and engaging. Nam has made fool-the-eye facsimiles of plastic bags from Gampi paper and printed them with the usual sentiments (i.e. "Thank You for Your Patronage") and placed them on sculpture pedestals to suggest they were casually "delivered" to their particular spots.

Inside these bags, she's placed white porcelain casts of Styrofoam clamshell delivery containers. Some can barely be seen through their translucent bags, though one bag lies open on its side, partially exposing its porcelain container.

Perrone's and Ericsson's work occupy the Print Center's two second-floor galleries.

Perrone is primarily a printmaker but also writes and constructs 3D works involving printed imagery. Her art touches on memory, nostalgia, and the uncanny. She has shown extensively in Philadelphia and elsewhere and is the founder and director of Officina Stamperia del Notaio, an artists' residency in Sicily.

She has two 3D works in her show, the larger of which, a floor piece titled *Something is About to Happen*, is a series of unique gum bichromate prints of landscapes she photographed in the Sicilian countryside, developed on paper in the sun, and then mounted on a faceted circular wood structure. Looking down at it, I'm reminded of an ancient sundial.

Her other 3D work, *Fata Morgana/Mondo Nuova (Tusa)*, is a box in which she's constructed an LED-illuminated view of what appears to be a Sicilian palazzo garden rendered in miniature using screen prints and watercolor, another out-of-the-ordinary use of printing.

I was most taken by a series of intaglio prints with cyanotype text, *fragments: revisited*, that represent Perrone's collaboration with her grandmother Ruth Bond Settle, a poet who went by the pen name Eunice Adams. In these works, Perrone wrote poems of her own to evoke the poetry in Adams' 1962 book *Fragments*, and illustrated them with jewel-colored geometric shapes resembling fragments of colored glass. Poem and image combine sublimely in the prints.

The past and the personal are also present, but mournfully, in Ericsson's exploration of his troubled family history, much of which revolves around his attempt to learn more about his mother, who committed suicide at 57 and whose ashes he incorporates in some of his works.

One of these, a monumental silkscreen photograph of his grandmother printed on muslin and titled *Jeanne*, dominates his show.

"It's terrible. I always feel awful doing it," Ericsson once told photographer and essayist Brad Feuerhelm. "But I feel good having done it. The process is awful, scraping over her remains in the urn, sifting through them, powdering the surface of the panel or muslin, mixing them into the resin and carbon graphite. It's a terrible process, but the end result is meaningful." I agree.

Works by Yoonmi Nam, Serena Perrone, and TR Ericsson, on exhibit through Aug. 6 at the Print Center, 1614 Latimer St., 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. 215-735-6090 or www.printcenter.org.

A promising Philly debut cut short

Given the recent fire at 319 N. 11th St., the building housing numerous artist collectives (Vox Populi, Tiger Strikes Asteroid, Napoleon Napoleon, Grizzly Grizzly, Marginal Utility, Practice, et al.) and various businesses, it will no longer be possible to see Colin O'Con's one-person show at Automat, which was originally scheduled to run through Sunday. Sadly, a description and a photo will have to suffice for his promising Philadelphia debut.

O'Con, originally from Natchitoches, La., and now based in Brooklyn and Holmes, N.Y., evokes his Southern roots in fiery colored but friendly resin floor sculptures and acrylic-on-canvas paintings.

Cyprus, a sinuous orange-and-blue sculpture in painted foam, called to mind the colors and the rounded abstract shapes in the work of abstract painter and sculptor Paul Feeley. O'Con's monumental painting *Deep South*, a swamp scene set against a Technicolor cadmium-yellow sky, was the show stealer.

Automat, 319 N. 11th St., closed temporarily, www.automatcollective.com.

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