

'Cuts' Show Features Mixed Media Works

By Arthur Whitman

Although printmaking is its purview, Ithaca's Ink Shop occasionally displays other types of art on paper. Their current show, "Cuts, Fragments & Collages," extends this aspect of their exhibitions, featuring aggressively mixed-media work by Masha Ryskin and Cristina de los Santos.

Both artists combine printmaking with drawing, painting, cutting and/or collage into works that are often pinned directly to the wall rather than framed or mounted on another hard surface. Papers often stick out, forming a relief-like effect. Compositions are dense and intricate. Abstract formats are twisted toward evocations of landscape or the body.

The more cohesive and developed aesthetic here belongs to the Providence, R.I.-based Ryskin. Although predominantly abstract, her pieces reflect a strong sense of nature, particularly of rocks and rivers. In tension with these allusions is the physicality of the pieces' making: delicate connecting lines, roughly drawn hatching and contouring, carefully brushed and casually dripping-down paint. Paint colors tend toward thin tints and suggest landscape: dull and rusty browns, blue-grays, green-ochres. A more opaque white is also used.

Incorporated into these collage paintings are fragments of intaglio-printed paper. Colors are distinct: a burnt orange, a shifty blue-green. The line work is similar to her drawing but crisper. Numbers and straight lines have



Photo provided

"Ruby Knot" by Cristina de los Santos of New Mexico.

been taken from a calendar. These scraps are sometimes used like tape, holding up colored strings and threads—connecting lines that play an important visual and metaphorical role.

"Floating" is a perfect analogy for the visual and bodily sensations evoked by Ryskin's work. Her pieces, especially the larger ones, tend to combine empty or sparsely filled-in spaces—the white of the wall or paper—with areas dense with incident. This sense of pulling in and out of focus is enhanced by her use of irregularly-shaped Mylar pieces, often layered over

rendered areas.

"Floating IV" is the show's richest piece. Moderately large, it takes up a well-defined stretch of wall bounded by architectural elements. Two separate sheets of paper have been unified into a larger whole with shading-like Mylar overlays and with lines of drawing and string. "Floating III" is smaller and is centered on a sheet of paper that sends out two tendrils, lines drawn on the wall, connecting to two smaller image fragments.

Both of these pieces remain rooted in the traditional idea of the picture, with its promise of a cohesive,

contained experience, while opening themselves up teasingly to the environment of the room. In contrast, the mural-sized "Journey by Air" seems radically diffused, lacking in focus or readily definable overall form. The piece is densely collaged and feels like it's peeling off of the wall. Drips of watery color and dangling threads give the piece a downward pull.

Three modestly-sized framed collages show Ryskin's strength in a more conventional vein. "Yellow Gate" and "Ledge" emphasize cutout blocks of printed-paper while the more landscape-like "Celebration" shows more painting and drawing. Vertical Mylar strips dominate the latter giving it a strong sense of visual sequence.

More so than Ryskin's, New Mexico-based Cristina de los Santos' work here recalls that of other contemporary and recent precedents. Artists such as Eva Hesse, Steve di Benedetto, Diana Cooper and Ati Maier come to mind, as do the imaginary worlds of comics and science fiction. Her work has a distinct set of motifs and associations: cities and machines, bodies and organs, angular patterning, nets and networks.

Her wall mounted collage drawing "Pummel" is particularly ambitious. A complex overall shape composed mainly of two irregular wedges of paper, one tan one beige, it explodes towards the middle-right into a straw-like bundle of elongated cutouts. Graphite and bright red colored pencil drawings evoke landscape: hills seen in profile, map-like aerial contours.

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