

A lace effect, in black and white

By Cate McQuaid
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Who knew that lace and the work of Boston artist Todd McKie existed in the same universe?

Galleries McKie's bold, flat paintings, populated with simply drawn, often comical characters and beasts, are a far cry from the intricate latticework of lace-making. But back in 2000, when McKie spent a month as artist-in-residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the lace collection seduced him. In his exhibit at Victoria Munroe Fine Art, "Adventures in the Lace Trade," McKie integrates his love of lace into a series of rich, stringent, and typically self-deprecating white-on-black drawings.

Nobody will mistake these drawings for your grandmother's doilies. McKie still offers up his cubist-inflected, cartoonish figures, which even in their most anguished moments provoke a laugh (see "Angst, Anyway," in which a poor, distorted fellow on spindly legs is wrung out by the black flames of emotion inside him).

The artist points out in the show's catalog that lace epitomizes the relationship between negative and positive space, and in these black-and-white drawings, McKie uses that device to great effect. "Isabella, Was Dat You?" offers an arced figure with a pendant breast and a squarish head peering into a potted fern. The negative space her body delineates swells beneath; McKie carves out the abstract elements of space with a surgeon's finesse.

He invokes tatting in ornamental borders and in the textures within each work. Using fine cross-hatching, bold grids, and smudging, he makes drawings — like "Could You Still Love Me If I Became a Fiber Artist?" — that almost look like fabric collages: lace, wool, burlap, felt, tweed.

McKie opened new avenues of thinking and art-making for himself, just by studying lace. At an upcoming residency in France, he intends to collect river rocks and paint on them. With each fresh project, he pushes his limits, and discovers his work anew.

Todd McKie: Adventures in the Lace Trade

At: Victoria Munroe Fine Art, 59 Beacon St., through March 1. 617-523-0661; www.munroefineart.com.

Masako Kamiya: Paintings and Jaclyn Salvaggio: Photographs

At: Gallery NAGA, 67 Newbury St., through March 1. 617-267-9060; www.gallerynaga.com.

Kevin T. Kelly: Mr. Bad Example

At: Kidder Smith Gallery, 131 Newbury St., through March 2. 617-424-6900; www.kiddersmithgallery.com.

Dotted with color

Masako Kamiya's got buzz. The young painter hasn't had many shows, but two exhibits in alternative galleries last year garnered her a review in *Art in America*. OSP Gallery has included her in its "Boston Abstraction Now" show with such heavy hitters as Bill Thompson and David Moore (up through March).

Kamiya has her own show at Gallery NAGA, and she merits the buzz. Call her a pointillist with depth. Working with acrylic gouache and a tiny brush, Kamiya paints small dots on her canvases. Painstakingly, she builds up each dot using different colors, creating thousands of miniature, multi-toned stalks in each painting. They hover like reeds over spare underdrawings, which map out simple circular patterns.

This obsessive, intricate technique creates luminous fields of color that change depending on where you stand, and paintings that are truly three-dimensional.

"Dance" features the looping circles described beneath the little stems of color, some just nubbins, some up to a quarter of an inch tall, looking like mushroom spores, in shades of blue and green. A view from the side reveals intricate layers of color you won't catch from the front.

Kamiya has a field day with color. Some works, like "Origin," which falls in the orange-salmon-coral range of tones, are bright and happy. "The Dead Sea" is deep

with shades of violet and blue. The tones and the textures alone make her work eye candy, but it's made with such painterly sophistication and precise technique, it's no wonder she's attracting attention. You don't have to know anything about art to like these paintings, but if you know just a little, they'll knock your socks off.

Also at NAGA, photographer Jaclyn Salvaggio's sepia-toned black-and-white photographs stand out more for their technique than their subject matter. Salvaggio prints a small photo, then peels the image from the paper's backing and puts it in her enlarger to print a negative. She goes through the process again, making a third-generation image. The results are haunting and feathery; they feel like antique photos and recall the dreamy, purposely blurred, theatrical images of early photographers like Julia Margaret Cameron, who used soft focus to mimic painting.

Soft focus is back these days (a principal practitioner of it, David Armstrong, has a show this month at Judy Ann Goldman Fine Art). Salvaggio aims to create fractured narratives with her pictures of young women in long gowns hanging out in cemeteries. Unfortunately, the images read like goth ads for some hip perfume. If Salvaggio applied her technique to more ordinary people in ordinary settings, creating a tension between content and form, her work would have intrigue that was less trumped up and more real.

Opposing bubbles

Kevin T. Kelly is a Roy Lichtenstein descendant, with an erotic twist. Like Lichtenstein, Kelly blows up comic-book-style images to broadcast simple, exaggerated messages about relationships. His paintings at Kidder-Smith Gallery have a Pop Art allure: They're bright, big, funny, and sexy. They're also not much more complicated than a sight gag. Unlike Kamiya's paintings, which you could hang on a wall and day after day find something new in them, with Kelly what you see is what you get.

Most pieces feature a "he said,



Todd McKie incorporates his love of lace in the drawing "It Smells Like Summer" (2000).

she said" scenario, in the guise of illustrated thought bubbles. "Grandma's Cookin'" shows a smiling older couple; she has her head on his shoulder. He's dreaming of her cooking: a syrupy stack of pancakes. Grandma, however, simply cooks: She dreams of a couple of young hotties in the sack together.

In "No Exit," a couple smooches in bed. The woman has her mind on a giant diamond ring; the man sees himself sneaking out the bedroom window. In most of these paintings, monochromatic backgrounds with bold, sinewy lines strongly suggest lovemaking; it's the foregrounds where life gets complicated with expectations.

Critics' Picks

Ongoing

SUZAN BATU: PAINTINGS features searingly bright colors dancing with fluid, decorative forms. The Turkish-born Batu offers work that combines Middle Eastern design motifs with Pop Art and Op Art. At O'H+T Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave., through March 1. 617-423-1677; www.ohtgallery.com.

FADE TO BLACK spotlights Richard DeVeau's paintings inspired by his work as a screenwriter. They feature circles inspired by projector reels collaged with pages of script. At Kingston Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave., through March 1. 617-423-4113.