

Provocative Visions

WATCHING THE BEATS

By K.D. Self

Listening to Emancipator's "Vision Quest," I ponder last weekend's provocations toward Spring. The first weekend of April 2018 was cold, a droning on of seemingly endless Winter. On Saturday, the outdoor farmers market did not feel Spring-like. Nevertheless, Bloomingtonians--myself included--attended the first April market ritually, seeking reassurance that Spring Life *will* follow the Death of Winter. Nearby, myriad town folk filled Fairview School for the Lotus Blossom World Bazaar, while an enthusiastic (and cold) crowd also gathered at the First Nation Traditional Powwow in Dunn Meadow (sponsored by IU's Office of Diversity).

The night before, though bone-chilled by a harsh wind, I meandered the first April Friday gallery walk in downtown Bloomington where, in various spaces, elevated images warmed my spirit. I loved Brian Talbert's small, exquisitely detailed color pencil drawings at the Ivy Tech Waldron Arts Center. And, I was taken aback by the provocative grace of work by three established Bloomington artists, each using distinct media.

Former IU Professor of English--and longtime photographer--John Woodcock has a lovely photographic exhibit at the Monroe County Convention Center continuing into mid-May. Images range from the sublime to the just plain fun. This collection features a couple of black-and-white pieces I particularly adore ("Tree Columns" and "Fences"), but his color photographs are also beautiful. Witness: The highly stylized, starkly intense "Tiger Lily" and the playful "Reflected World" (a bubble photo, generated while with his grandchildren). What strikes me about Woodcock's work is the sacred nature of each picture. The title of his exhibit says it all: "Catching the Eye/Stopping the Mind." Landscape or flower or bubble or moon photographs are not simply representational--these are challenging, mindful Life poems.

Also artistically provocative is the work of lifelong designer and abstract artist James B. Campbell—a frequent exhibitor at the John Waldron Arts Center. In his April 2018 show at the Vault, Jim's pieces were dynamic and sculptic, mostly constructed from acrylic on wood (some with aluminum augments; he also carves foam and uses PVC). Campbell's shaped images are elegant, enigmatic, organic. He writes: "The curvilinear shapes of my work activate their surroundings, become a part of it, and invite a re-examination of our habits of perception."

Given that cold first April Friday's gallery walk, and given our difficult ecological times, I felt blessed to next view illustrators Joe and Bess Lee's sideshow / bannerline posters at the Blueline Gallery. In a quite unusual exhibit a range of endangered species' plights were revealed through the medium of circus posters. At first glance, these images appear whimsical. The colors are bright blues, reds, and yellows. Yet below the initial impression of primary lightness, the viewer realizes underlying darkness. Each brightly illuminated poster provokes human observers to stop and think about our at-risk animal cohorts. Thirty-percent of sales from this April show went to Earth Charter Indiana. Check their website. Earth Charter's principles include: "respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, grassroots democracy, and a culture of peace"--values essential for our troubled modern world.

Today, finally, sky turned blue and Sun warmed my heart.

"Tree Column," photo
by John Woodcock



"Worlds Apart
Surpassing Flight,"
acrylic on wood/PVC
by James B. Campbell



"Orangutan,"
circus poster by
Bess & Joe Lee



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