

Close to the Edge: Upcoming Figge Exhibits Push Boundaries and Confound Expectations

Written by

Tuesday, 29 August 2006 22:49

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When the Davenport Museum of Art brought in Lauren Greenfield's *Girl Culture* exhibit in 2003, it was the institution's boldest exhibit to-date. A venue not known for being confrontational showcased Greenfield's high-gloss photographs with their blunt, distressing messages about the status of girls and women in the world.

This fall, the DMA's descendant, the Figge Art Museum, will be getting edgy again, but in an entirely different way. In addition to the current show of landscape photography (on display through October 8) and an upcoming display of African-American quilts (November 18 through February 11), the Figge will have two exhibits that are likely to alternately unsettle, excite, and

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confound audiences. And even the landscape and quilt shows break some boundaries.

But the stars of the show this fall will be *The Architect's Brother* (featuring the work of Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison) and *Adventures in a Temperate Climate* (a retrospective of work by Martin Mull). The photographic constructions of the ParkeHarrisons and the paintings of Mull - yes, the actor, comedian, and former Red Roof Inn hawker - are startling, engaging, and enigmatic.

The ParkeHarrisons' work (September 2 through October 29) has the hazy texture of antique photographs but with a post-apocalyptic feel that recalls the expressively outré, aggressively odd cinematic works of Terry Gilliam and the Brothers Quay.

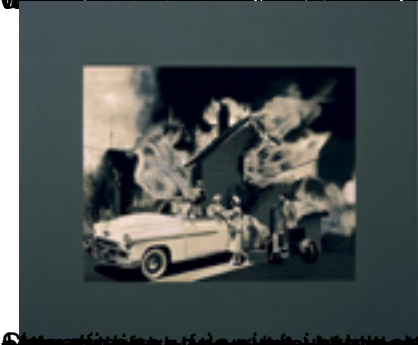
On the other hand, Mull's work (October 28 through January 21) combines clean-cut imagery from the 1950s in ways that undermine the cultural idealization of the era.

Unlike Greenfield's work, which has the power to anger and upset audiences because of its highly specific portrayal of recognizable reality, the ParkeHarrisons and Mull make the viewer uneasy with ambiguous motives and imagery. They clearly have a point of view, but it's one that's open to interpretation.

Finding Hope in Vague Dread

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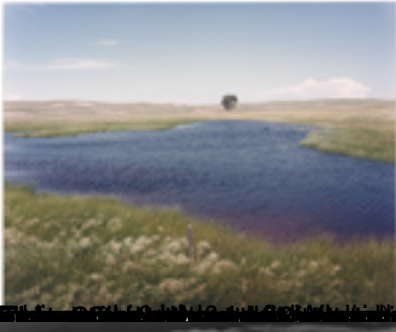
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