

## Scrap Metal, Fresh Work

Written by Michael LoGuidice  
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David Campbell's large, realistic sculptures overwhelm a space and demand the viewer's attention, while Marguerite Perret's prints delicately await the audience's close inspection. This contrast makes for an excellent show at MidCoast Gallery West on the corner of Second Avenue and 17th Street, just west of the plaza in downtown Rock Island. As you walk into the gallery, your attention is commanded by Campbell's blues guitarist, and it might take a while for you to realize that there are prints on the wall to look at also.

This show is a must-see for print lovers and sculpture appreciators. Both artists have mastered their medium, and in both cases the medium conforms to the will of the artist. This is especially high praise for Perret's prints, because she uses digital graphic-arts tools. Yet those tools are not showcased; the message of the print is paramount.

Perret's artist statement has the tenor of a person who experiences the world through literature and other media sources: "Very little experience of the natural world comes from direct observation. Most of what is learned about the natural world is mediated by institutions, print publishers, television and film producers, and software developers. As our encounter of nature is increasingly experienced through secondary sources, this helps to extend a sense of alienation from nature as an otherworldly place outside of daily human experience." With this view of media-colored experiences, her work is all the more remarkable for its freshness.

One part of Perret's show consists of several works from an installation titled *Diagnostik*. Her artist statement describes this part of the exhibit much better than I can: "The installation is based on research in the collections of the University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics Medical Museum. ... An emphasis was placed on historical materials associated with the treatment of mental illness. The Iowa State Psychopathic Hospital (1921-1991) opened the same year Rorschach's inkblot test was first printed. An association is drawn between these two events to acknowledge the stress placed on devising a scientific approach to treating mental illness in Iowa and elsewhere at this time. However, the cause of mental illness still eluded physicians in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and treatment options were often more damaging than beneficial.

### *Diagnostik*

explores the limitations of these treatments, often emphasizing the patient's perspective. This is accomplished through use of patient documents and records, and first-person accounts."

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In contrast to this media-inspired approach, we have Campbell's sculptures. One sculpture might use hub caps for knee caps, or integrate the body of the motorcycle rider with the frame of the machine, or use springs and spiral steel scraps for hair. The *Blues Musicians* (there are two) are more than 10 feet tall and are quite imposing yet friendly in a rustic, welcoming sort of way.

David's sculptures are delightful and clearly based on his own firsthand experience, or when there is an inspiration from the media, he draws heavily on his own vocabulary of found objects to express it. Campbell's statement underscores his view: "His art ... leaves a haunting image of a time past and a time remembered. ... Scrap metal is used to fashion a compilation of the State of Illinois, driftwood and roots are used to fashion a frame around one of his works, or wood and conduit used to construct a rifle. Items that are normally overlooked or cast aside all become contributions to his works."

Sensitive and poignant are not the first words that come to mind when first viewing Campbell's work, but there is a sensitivity that enables him to use discarded objects and form the three-dimensional illusion of a figure. The first impression of the artwork is the figure, the expression, and the emotion being felt by the figure. It is only after you process the emotional impact of the sculpture that you realize it is constructed from scrap metal.

I do not recall any female figures in Campbell's exhibit, and it would be interesting to see how his freewheeling style would interpret the feminine energy. I say this because male energy tends to spark outward – and it's easy to see that in these sculptures – while female energy resonates inward to give form.