

Addition through Subtraction

Written by Michael LoGuidice
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The most striking thing about Emily Lambertsen's paintings is her compositions. She works from photographs, but her compositions create images that transcend the original photo. Color is used sparingly but dramatically to enhance the effect. It seems like she adds the minimum amount of paint, color, or charcoal to create the illusion she seeks.

I like Lambertsen's paintings, but I'm completely unqualified to pass judgment on the basket-weaving of Patti Hawkins, the other artist featured in the current show at the MidCoast Fine Arts Gallery at the Mississippi Valley Welcome Center in LeClaire. The exhibit features 17 drawings and paintings by Lambertsen and 15 baskets by Hawkins and runs through November.

Lambertsen's artist statement discusses what she's trying to accomplish with her paintings: "I am currently exploring the idea of reality and its relation to time, change, memory, and fantasy through re-drawing or re-painting photographs. ... Neither the scene depicted nor any allusions to a narrative are as important to me as the formal qualities of the image. Each piece of artwork in this show was created because of a certain nuance of light or shape noticed in the source photograph. By recreating the nuance through my own hand, taking full liberty to add or delete information as I please, I hope to unveil a new level of reality. It is a reality which did not exist in the source photograph, but is now fully realized in the artwork."

In her painting *Here's Looking ...*, Lambertsen uses a photo that could have come out of a 1930s black-and-white movie. The composition is re-worked to create the area of interest on the right side of the composition. The hero is in focus while all other figures are blurred into the background. It is a dramatic painting without being over-the-top.

This Day uses more color but retains the in-focus/out-of-focus technique to draw the viewer's eye to the area of interest. Even with the areas that are in focus, Lambertsen shies away from the sharp-edged focus of the typical photo realist. Her in-focus images retain a softness of form that makes them comfortable.

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Tourists is another interesting painting, one that draws upon photo collage for its composition. It is a black-and-white painting that groups people as if they were on a plaza in some tourist Mecca. Most of the people are in groups of two. The size and placement of the people creates the illusion of depth. The focal point appears to be somewhere off to the right, with one tourist pointing his camera in that direction. The flip in this composition is that the viewers become the viewed as we view the viewers.

Lambertsen's paintings are well done and very affordable. The highest priced work is \$450 for a four-foot-by-two-foot painting. Most of them are priced at between \$120 and \$350.

Patti Hawkins appears to have a very good reputation among the basket-weavers in the United States, having shown in exhibitions as far away as Vancouver. She specializes in the twill pattern of weaving, and the baskets are neat, clean, and very well done. Beyond that, I don't have much to say because I know so little about basket-weaving.

Hawkins' artist statement does provide some insight: "My discovery of basket-making 17 years ago seemed to be a natural progression from my upbringing. I was accustomed to working with my hands, and found that musical rhythms logically translate into the rhythms of weaving, especially twills.

"I have experimented with almost every form of basketry, but I am primarily drawn to the mathematical symmetry and natural rhythms of twill leaves. Incorporating a variety of textures and layers is also a focus of my current work, which has been inspired by the handwork I learned as a child. It never ceases to amaze me how all the joy and pain in life combine to influence my basketry, and how infinite the possibilities are!"

I enjoyed this exhibition for the paintings and the trip to the Mississippi Valley Welcome Center. It is well worth the trip to view this show, and there are some bargain-priced paintings to be had.