

THE 2007 DECORDOVA ANNUAL EXHIBITION

Through August 12 at the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park • Lincoln, MA • www.decordova.org

In the DeCordova Museum's 2007 annual exhibition, you won't find paintings, landscapes, or works that focus on physicality or the body. Expressionism, minimalism, conceptualism, much in the way of abstraction, and art that surprises or provokes are all absent. You will find well-crafted works—prints, collage, photographs, sculpture, drawings, and installation—by a fairly narrow range of artists, some of which straddle the borderline between fine art and craft or tend toward illustration.

The show that results from the DeCordova curators' predilection for overall mark-making, pattern, and decoration hardly exhibits the range of work one would expect from an annual selection in which the goal is to highlight some "of the best, most interesting, and visually eloquent" work being made by New England artists.

That said, there is some appealing work here. In Sarah Amos's large, multisheet paper works, lines and pattern seem to float over and through the fabric-like surface she has created with collograph and carborundum etching, pencil, and charcoal on Japanese paper. The artist uses a palette of reds, blacks, yellows, and browns and discrete layered marks—dots, dashes, undulating lines, and decorative motifs—to evoke a vast and shifting landscape, Japanese woodcuts, and Australian Aboriginal art. If there is a fault, it is the homogeneity of these sensuously surfaced works.

Craft and sculpture cohabit in Nathalie Miebach's engaging hanging works, in which polychrome reeds, woven into organic basketry forms, are paired with projecting, Tinkertoy-like elements. Contrast between the twisted bulk of the woven form and the inserted linear elements is sometimes lacking, but is effective at its most dramatic in my favorite piece, *Boston Tides*. Miebach attempts to convey meteorological

and ornithological observations using paper labels, painted wood, and reeds that sprout from the central woven forms. The scientific data is inscrutable, however, and the warning on climate change seems at odds with the celebratory energy of the sculpture itself.

Two of the ten artists have made site-specific pieces. Sandra Allen's black-and-

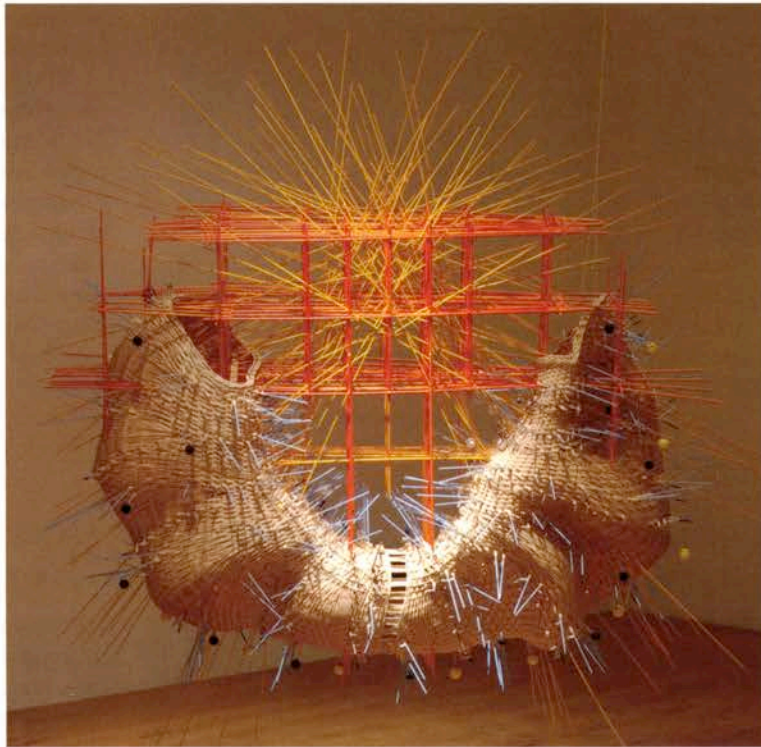
insulation, and is embellished with oversized textile patterns clumsily stitched with garish acrylic yarns.

Jeff "Jeffu" Warmouth's multimedia spoof, *Spudnik*, which takes a pun to extreme lengths by documenting space exploration by potatoes, is appropriately silly. Elke Morris's understated, digitally manipulated, and selectively focused photographs of multifamily houses in Lewiston, Maine, seem slightly academic. Jungil Hong's large screen-printed collages are poorly sited in a narrow corridor. Hong's dense pieces combine 1960s psychedelic pattern and day-glow color with Monty Python-like caricature and surreal imagery. In the confined space, I found it impossible to assess their impact.

Also borrowing heavily from conventions of cartooning and illustration are Ria Brodell's imagined animals. They possess charm, but her creatures don't activate the space, whether placed on paper in two dimensions or plopped down on the floor in three. The mesmerizing motion of Anne Lilly's touchable and ingeniously engineered steel kinetic sculptures make them the star attraction for children, but they are visually unexciting. Robert

Taplin updates the traditionally comic figure of Punch, in diminutive tableaux under a cubic foot in size, turning him alternately into sadistic perpetrator or hapless victim. Cast in translucent, alabaster-like urethane resin in marketable editions, these proficiently made pieces mimic the slickness of collectible figurines. A couple of the pieces make a political point, but the ultimate effect of observing Punch copulate or furtively urinate in a vase is to place the viewer in the unpleasant position of voyeur. As to the parody, once you get it, there's not much reward in looking further.

—Anne Krinsky



Nathalie Miebach, *Boston Tides*, reeds, 8' x 35" x 8', 2006.

white pencil drawings of trees are meticulously drawn from photographs. Her technical tour de force—a larger-than-life, 37-foot-high palm-tree trunk on a white paper scroll—is perfectly suited to the 40-foot wall at the base of the museum's three-story staircase. Samantha Fields' funny and intentionally awkward second-floor installation *Wallpapered Space II* is a welcome antidote to the overabundance of well-crafted works in the show. Using a claustrophobic space to good advantage, she has constructed a floor-to-ceiling façade from vinyl siding, over an existing interior wall. In an intriguing juxtaposition of materials, the patched-and-perforated vinyl reveals crocheted afghans in place of