

print

Third Friday showcases Golden Belt artists

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It was Third Friday and Golden Belt was humming. People were all over the place, the parking lot was full, Only Burger was busy selling its hamburgers, and art and artists were holding forth. Even the American Dance Festival had chosen this venue to announce its new season.

At LabourLove Gallery, four artists, each in a unique way, used the theme of abandoned buildings, worn-out architecture and reclamation of such sites to make their art.

Luke Miller Buchanan, who has been working with this idea for several years, begins with photographs of a particular place and then collages and pieces the image together using paint, bits of photographs and sometimes found objects from the site.

The finished image is recognizable, but somewhat askew as if the subject is about to tumble down and the only thing holding it together is this painting.

If the facility is beyond redemption, then Buchanan saves it from extinction with his canvas. He is very good at what he does and each time he presents a body of work it is better than the last.

Michael Mills writes about finding the apocalyptic landscape of the sci-fi films of his childhood and with his camera can make them a visual reality. His photographs of the interiors of worn out structures are in stark grays, whites and blacks.



Decay is everywhere: a gym in a psychiatric hospital, a rough unfinished place where a steel ladder provides access to the roof, or a claustrophobic throughway.

In another series, using deep blacks with flares of penetrating light, Mills photographs bent window blinds across a window, a truck hidden in shadows parked in front of a house, a run-down beach house and a stand of trees silhouetted against a shimmering light.

Mills makes use of all the technology of digital photography and with a keen sense of artistic perfection brings the darkest darks up just enough to allow us to see what is really there.

Jenifer Padilla's new group of paintings focuses on the old port at Wilmington, N.C., and exploits her passion for things left behind.

Her canvases are big, painterly, abstract and visually exciting, with a palette of vibrant blues and dashes of whites, yellows and blacks. "Crane 8 AKA Sally" is an example with dark streaks of paint projecting upwards like masts of old ships or iron girders of cranes while large sea gulls make white swoops and darts through the canvas surface.

In another painting, large splashes of colors held in check by soft lines suggest the big containers that fill the decks of international freighters.

Padilla uses her many skills to put the remembered strength of a North Carolina industry into paint and canvas.

Jeff Bell gathers stuff from junk yards or the side of the road, cuts them up, reworks them and creates small sculptures.

By recycling he makes new connections as in "Rock/Slide" which is made of metal from an automobile, wood from an old piano and something that looks like a hydraulic pump.

He told me each reinvention has allusions to the world around him such as furniture, toys, fairy tales or cartoons.

In Room 100, Tama Hochbaum has mounted a series of photographs illustrating "Alice in Wonderland."

Hochbaum starts with a photographic image she creates and then reworks it into a composite by adjusting and readjusting it digitally until the image seems to be in motion defying its two dimensional form.

This grouping began with a commissioned project to produce one image based on the "Alice in Wonderland" story. Hochbaum said she loved the parameters of the written text and so illustrations took over her creative life.

She has worked on this body of work for over two years; it is a wonderfully creative presentation of the children's classic.

Alice is played by her daughter Claire, who is the star of the show and has, according to Hochbaum, been her muse for close to 14 years. In the inaugural piece Alice falls down the rabbit hole past a curved bookshelf filled with books and finds herself in a great hall with columns and arches following a scurrying rabbit. It is all there: Alice too small to reach the golden key and too big to fit into the spaces, the caterpillar smoking his hookah, the walrus, the Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter's tea party, the Knave of Hearts and, finally, the cards tumbling around Alice.

It would seem the Alice story would be too worn out to find some fresh way to illustrate it, but Hochbaum has done just that and the experience should send parents to the stores to introduce a new generation to one of literature's finest fantasies.

Before leaving the complex I walked through the artists' spaces and found Aditya Shringarpure, a computer programmer who rents a wall just on Third Friday to show his work. He uses photographic transfers combined with delicate paint strokes to make small haunting images.

Further down the hall is Adam Narcross, a regular tenant who paints the female nude in its full anatomical beauty.

Narcross works as an architectural draftsman to support his passion for painting and is self-taught. It is hard to believe he learned his craft by consulting "how to" books.

The next time you visit Golden Belt look for these artists and many more.

Blue Greenberg's column appears each week in Entertainment and More. She can be reached at blueg@bellsouth.net or by writing her in c/o The Herald-Sun, P.O. Box 2092, Durham, NC 27702.

If you go

Golden Belt: "Progression or Recession: Luke Miller Buchanan, Michael Mills, Jenifer Padilla and Jeff Bell," LabourLove Gallery, through May 14; "Down the Rabbit Hole: Installation by Tama Hochbein," Room 100, through April 14. There are also 35 artists' studios in the facility, at 807 E. Main St., Durham.

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