

# FOUR SHOWS AT CMCA

Phil Isaacson - 2013

Center for Maine Contemporary Art

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CLAIRE SEIDL

I recommend with great enthusiasm the current group of exhibitions at Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockport.

The title of the event, "Four Exhibitions," suggests that this is a major undertaking on the part of CMCA. Four is a big number for any gallery. With a limited season and high ambitions, CMCA does not have the luxury of slack times.

The members of the four – there are six of them – are so dissimilar that they give the event an engaging freshness. The show exemplifies an adventurousness that no other institution of its kind has the luxury of pursuing.

"Four Exhibitions" comprises events as follows: Peter Soriano in "Bagaduce: East 19th," Duncan Hewitt and Claire Seidl under the title "What Was, Is," Anna Hepler in "New Work," and Lesia Sochor and Crystal Cawley under the title "Dress Shop."

Sochor and Cawley are located in the lower gallery area, the most homogeneous space for work requiring attention to craftsmanship and detail.

Sochor abstracts her paintings from conventional paper sewing patterns and modifies them with thin layers of paint. The instructions on the patterns (bodice front, size, etc.) ease their way up through the levels of the work except in those areas in which Sochor has applied her paint. In them, conspicuously beautiful garments or female forms of her invention appear.

The interplay between the craftsmanship implied by the instructions and the beauty of Sochor's applied forms is fascinating. The wonder of letterpress printing, the precise use of language and the gorgeousness of the well-clothed figure combine to form a remarkable species of graphic art. This is work of great beauty.

Cawley is wondrous at her art. If you have a taste for the minuscule, the irresistible in detail, invention without apparent end and the wonders of type and letterpress, you are approaching the qualities that I can suggest in her work. There are probably more among her intentions that I don't yet see.

Here, Cawley is represented by "One Hundred Drawings of the Same Thing" and a smaller group called "Thinking Caps."

"One Hundred" is, as its name implies, a mixed-media work composed of 100 distinct but thematically related units.

The subject, with few exceptions, is the female torso realized within the form of a dressmaker's model. The torso may have components drawn from the female anatomy, a collection of chicken eggs, viscera, odes and more inventions than I can catalogue rendered with stitched or other fancy surfaces.

"Thinking Caps" is a collection of five printed and often extravagant images of hats intended to reflect the phrase "Put Your Thinking Cap On." It succeeds brilliantly.

There are other works by Sochor and Cawley of equal virtue in one of the stairwells.

Hewitt and Seidl occupy the main gallery with "What Was, Is." This portion is also the fourth installment in CMCA's ongoing Counterpoint Series, an effort intended to encourage a dialogue between the work of two artists.

Here, the sculpture of Hewitt and Seidl's photographs and paintings create a conversation about materiality, time and memory. The charge is a tall

order, and requires more reflection than I have been able to allot it, but the event does become an encouragement to memory and such materiality as we are able to accord it.

Seidl's silver gelatin prints and Hewitt's "Windshield" series treat of other times, and in doing so, remind us that what was, remains is.



PIE IN THE SKY

Through the expediency of Hewitt's carved and painted facsimiles of particular auto windshields, the pathway of memory is opened to other related events. Some are provoked by the wood form; others are inspired by it. The materiality of the expression – our response to it – is left to our experience.

Seidl's photographs serve a similar purpose through their reference to certain physical events. Unlike Hewitt, they are not the product of perceived events; they are the product of the occasions themselves as perceived by the artist.

Floorboards, windows and swimmers in the moonlight emerge in factual form but different enough from our perception of them to benefit from an introduction by the artist. In them, the eye of the painter is not far away.

The upper gallery is occupied by Soriano and Hepler. In Soriano's case, we are treated to recent drawings and a substantial selection of wall works. The nature

of this event does not conform to the site-specific installations that have been seen in other venues. The work is not specific to a particular location; it can be reproduced in accordance with instructions provided by the artist.

This concept is most easily seen in pieces referred to as "wire works." They are pieces composed of spray-painted lines and other arcane markings on walls allied with lengths of pipe and steel cables.



MOON, LIGHT, SWIMMERS

The composition of wall, wire, pipe and linear forms offers an experience in architectural modernism, in the benign use of an otherwise social affliction (spray paint), the perfect tension achievable with wire under prim control, and the wonders of flawless plumbed pipe. They are irresistible in intention and execution.

The concept of art accomplished by others through instruction is carried further in the large wall piece, "Bagaduce: East 19th." It omits all accoutrements other than a variety of painting methods that include spraying, stenciling and brushwork, and implies that it is achievable within an acceptable limit of errors.

In it, there are the markings that suggest the pavements of East 19th Street in Manhattan and the neighborhood of the Bagaduce River in Penobscot, all in the private language of the artist and the keepers of the public way. It is a fascinating excursion from sculpture to self-achieved relevance.

Hepler's work also has its fascinations. From two elegant small ceramic spheres to large forms composed of an intersection of thin wires, there is a sense of continuity.

The ceramic pieces, particularly "Altered Sphere," suggest the bulbous forms that the wire pieces ultimately take. Each have unanticipated fusions, the ceramic leaning toward a modified sense of spherical harmony, the wire works carrying that sense into derivative forms sliced by sudden shifts of surface and invention.

The sphere is Hepler's private apple.

Philip Isaacson of Lewiston has been writing about the arts for the Maine Sunday Telegram for 48 years.