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wednesday, april 11, 2007

Memories are made of this

ALL Arts & Literature Laboratory

Erector Square, 319 Peck St. Building 2, New Haven, (203) 671-5175

Random Access Memory: Colleen Tully and Liz Pagano

Mar. 31—Apr. 29, 2007.

There is something in the cultural moment that is making the concept of "memory" such fertile terrain for artists' explorations. Is it pessimism about the future? Concern that looking ahead is a dive into the dystopic bleakness? (Seen the film *Children of Men*?) Is fear of the future the impetus for this exploration of the past, this ransacking of the aesthetic intellectual attic? Is there security in memories that an uncertain future doesn't offer? (Which is not to ignore the fact that for some or many, memories are the focal point of terror, hurt and loss.)

Whatever the reason, these days *Remembrance of Things Past* trumps *The Shape of Things to Come*.

In the ALL Gallery show *Random Access Memory*, **Liz Pagano** and **Colleen Tully** process the concept of memory in different but not unrelated ways.

Tully proceeds from the physical artifacts of particular memories—old photographs, maps—into abstraction. Specifically, she takes images and scans them into a computer. The scanned images are manipulated: ratcheting up the color saturation, applying halftone dot screen effects and then enlarging the dots. Tully prints out these images on transparent Mylar, layering them against each other in a way that hints at representation while frustrating it.

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The photomechanical process that usually serves to make relationships of tone, shadow and contour readable and reproducible is here subverted. What we read is the inner workings of the image. As Tully describes it in her artist's statement, "It was as if I was looking at the molecules of a memory under a microscope and finding links to other memories and new (or long-forgotten) emotions."

In some of these works, Tully adds a hand-drawn element, using a Sharpie marker on the Mylar to sketch circles in pathways or arrays. These drawn shapes echo the digitally printed imagery but also contrast with it. They impose the chaos of human action on the (seemingly) inexorable logic of the machine.

In all her works, the relationship of elements is paramount. The triptych "Delicate City" may have had its genesis in a scanned image of Tully's native New



Orleans. But what catches the eye is the way clusters of translucent dots intersect and interact. Serpentine paths of black twist and turn through the three panels. Clearings open and then are enclosed again. Darker dots overlap lighter dots, generating penumbras, eyeballs and stars.

The abstraction is lighter in "Purple Banana Seat Bicycle, 1968." There is a dance in the play of dots that evokes Pop Art, **Roy Lichtenstein's** comic book swipes sans the black lines.

Where Tully works outward from memories to abstraction, Pagano works from abstraction to memories. A printmaker, Pagano has a couple of collaged works on paper in this show. But most of her pieces layer glass and Plexiglass marked with ink, paint and scratches. There is a plethora of nature-derived forms in this

archives

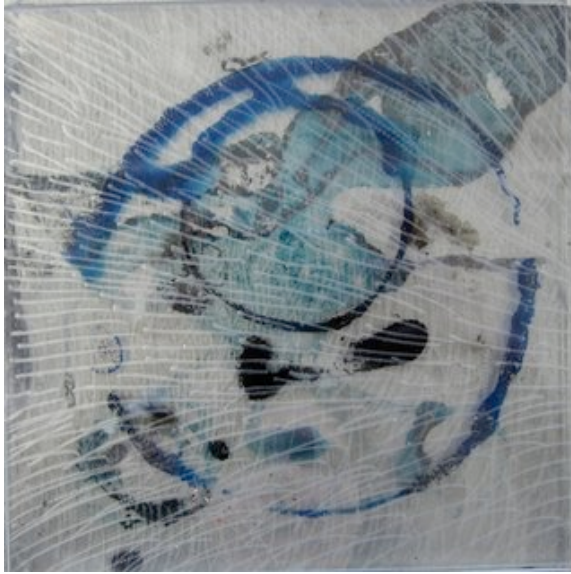
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imagery. In part this is because Pagano is deliberately making marks inspired by natural forms, for example, wood grain. But it is also because materials like ink on glass behave in a, well, natural way—spreading, congealing, crystallizing.

In constructing her compositions, Pagano, like Tully, layers elements. In these unrelated abstractions, Pagano may then see a relationship. And that relationship is a memory.

These are then, in some sense, triggers of memory. In particular, a series of small works along one



wall—"Home," "River," "Uncas Road," "Ice Storm of '73" and the evocatively titled "Swing Set and Skunk Cabbage"—are, for Pagano, visual touchstones connecting her to childhood memories.

Particularly compelling are two large works by Pagano—"Memory Catcher (That Was Then)" and "Memory Catcher (Before Then)." These are assemblages composed inside double-framed windows. They incorporate suminigashi printmaking technique, monotype, etched Plexiglass, string and nails to create 3-D maps of place, topography, time and emotion. In these pieces, memory is understandable as process and interaction, with depth, complexity and mystery.

It is fitting that although Pagano's and Tully's processes are almost mirror images, they both employ overlay techniques to achieve their ends. Memories, overlays: it makes sense. Form suited to content. Memories are always contextual with overlays of backstory experiences prior to the event and situating experiences subsequent.

posted by hank hoffman at 1:34 pm | 0 comments 

