

# Artists are a natural fit for exhibits at Hillyer

BY MARK JENKINS

The three shows now at Hillyer Art Space are separate, yet they grew from the same seed. All of the artists celebrate nature for its forms, its fecundity and its enchantment.

In "Branching Out," Marc Robarge and Alex L. Porter depict botanical tendrils, sometimes in contrast to manmade objects. Porter's large, detailed drawings foreground silhouetted trees, often with buildings behind them. The structures are simply gray masses, cleanly outlined but featureless. The trees also lack color and texture, but their intricate arrays of boughs make them as imposing as any cathedral.

Robarge builds oversize branches of wood, plaster and wire, painted realistically. Most are wall-mounted; one hangs in the middle of the gallery, as unavoidable as a downed tree across a road. All of the pieces are naturalistic, but some add an incongruous element with a vine-like aspect: a pair of headphones on a cord, a movable shower head on a flexible metallic hose. Clever devices, but they can't upstage a twist of imitation vegetation.

Nicole Fall also constructs plantlike sculptures, seemingly pliant petals and fronds, from hard substances. The wall pieces in "The Essential Visible" are bronze or ceramic, but two larger floor assemblages employ fabric, mostly in unnatural hues. Fall's concerns include humanity's violence, both against nature and its own kind, yet for all its stylistic clamor, the show has a gentle disposition. It's less rebuke than respite.

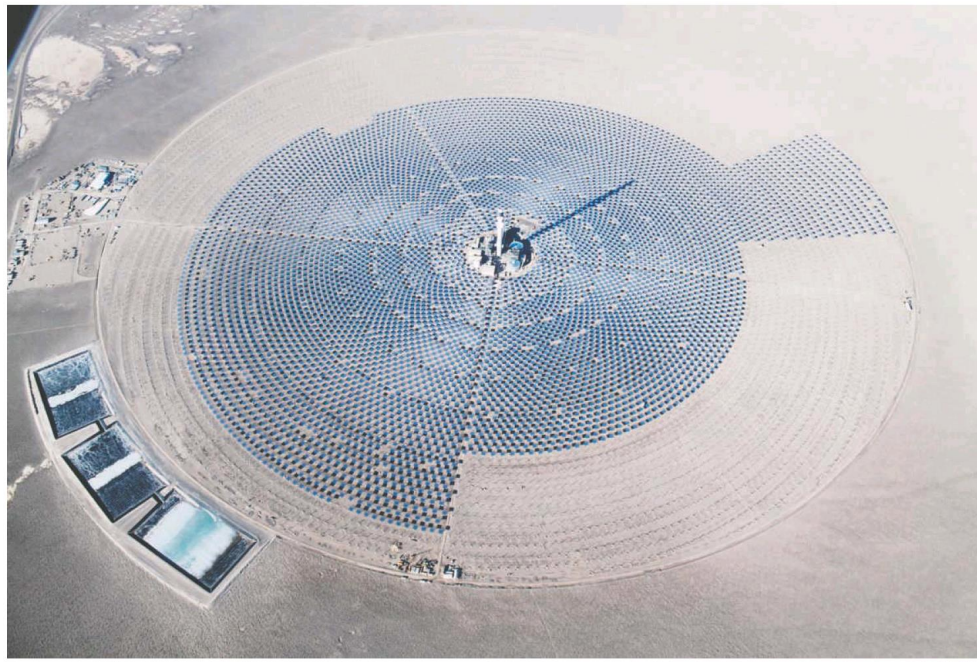
Helen Frederick's installation, "Unearthing: Images of Silence," simulates the experience of being within nature. Three stumplike sculptures contain video monitors that show impressionistic images of water, earth and trees; these are accompanied by a whisperry soundtrack that invokes the experience of walking through a shadowy forest. The screens also provide much of the light in the small room, which is darkened to suggest being under a thick canopy of leaves. There also are three paintings, made on mottled handmade paper so that image and texture mingle. The pictures, it could be said, become part of the landscape — just as viewers do when they enter the gallery.

**Marc Robarge + Alex L. Porter: Branching Out.** **Nicole Fall: The Essential Visible.** **Helen Frederick: Unearthing: Images of Silence** On view through Feb. 27 at Hillyer Art Space, 9 Hillyer Ct. NW. 202-338-0680. hillyerartspace.org.

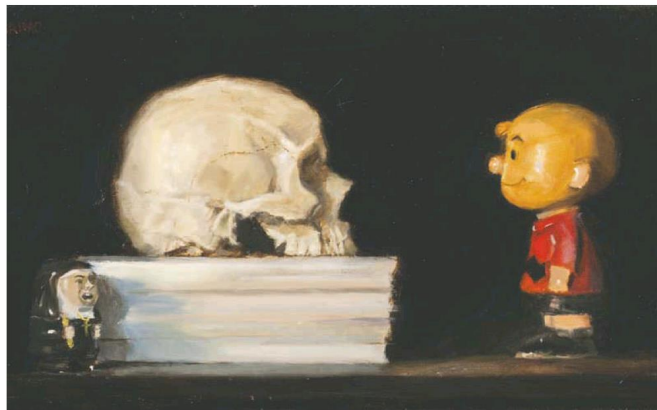
**J.T. Kirkland and Brian Williams**

Surface intriguingly complements depth in the paintings of J.T. Kirkland and Brian Williams, whose styles are compatible yet disparate in both technique and materials. Adah Rose Gallery is showing the local artists at two locations — its home in Kensington and Studio 1469 in Columbia Heights. The latter space, which is larger, holds the bigger and generally newer work.

Neither artist's pictures can be called "canvases." Williams paints with oils on aluminum panels, layering the pigment to lustrous effect. Kirkland employs acrylic on wood, which he repeatedly sands to reveal the grain and blur the distinction between



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MARK GIAIMO

ABOVE: Mark Gialmo's "Knowledge and Wisdom" at Susan Calloway Fine Arts. TOP: Image of Crescent Dunes Thermosolar Plant, at the former residence of the ambassadors of Spain.

**Language but Even It's Becoming Beautiful** On view through Feb. 27 at Adah Rose Gallery, 3766 Howard Ave., Kensington. 301-922-0162. adahrosegallery.com. Studio 1469, 1469 Harvard St. NW, rear. 202-518-0804. studio1469.com.

**Mark Gialmo**

The window at Susan Calloway Fine Arts displays some of Mark Gialmo's timelier paintings: caricatures of four presidential candidates. Two more are inside, yet the exhibition is not primarily a showcase for the Arlington artist's illustrations or cartoons. It's devoted mostly to "The Secret Life of Toys," a series that juxtaposes classical motifs and plastic figurines.

In Gialmo's playful updates of academic paintings, the sailor overboard in a turbulent sea is Cap'n Crunch, and the philosopher who contemplates death in the shape of a skull is Charlie Brown. "Peanuts" characters re-

cur, whether it's Snoopy posing with a sculpted nude or Lucy in the sky with a diamond. The artist, who works for The Washington Post's Sunday Magazine, notes that toys are cheaper than live models and "can hold a pose forever." Their use also comments on commercialization and mechanical duplication. Making one-of-a-kind pictures of mass-produced trinkets is a gentle protest against a world in which processed-food mascots supersede individual imaginations.

**Mark Gialmo: The Secret Life of Toys** On view through Feb. 20 at Susan Calloway Fine Arts, 1643 Wisconsin Ave. NW. 202-965-4601. callowayart.com.

**Designing America**

Of the 10 biggest U.S. cities, four have Spanish names and seven are in territory once controlled by Spain. "Designing America: Spain's Imprint in the U.S.," at the former residence of the ambassadors of Spain, literally charts that heritage. The bulk of the material dates from the Age of Exploration and includes maps made when Europeans still thought California was an island. (Such misconceptions weren't corrected because previous renderings of the "new" world were classified state secrets.)

Some displays, notably one on a Spanish construction firm now working on New York's subway, are more appropriate to a trade show than a general exhibition. But there's much of interest in this wordy, somewhat haphazard selection, especially to those with an interest in maps, architecture and urban planning. The Spanish were designing gridded cities in the wilderness long before Pierre L'Enfant ever saw the Potomac, and helped make metropolises that were never part of their empire. One 20th-century map, for example, identifies some 2,000 Manhattan buildings erected by Barcelona-rooted Guastavino Fireproof Construction. Long after Spanish explorers stopped seeking cities of gold, their successors found other riches here.

**Designing America: Spain's Imprint in the U.S.** On view through Feb. 28 at the former residence of the ambassadors of Spain, 2801 16th St. NW. spainculture.us. style@washpost.com

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what is made and what is found.

Rarely strictly rectangular, Kirkland's pieces feature cut-off corners and are framed with either painted stripes or wooden strips. Although still partially sculptural, the more recent works are less geometric and more concerned with melding wood and paint. If Kirkland can't make the pigment seep into the material, as color-field innovators once did with canvas, he has devised a technique in which form and content are very nearly unified.

Some of Williams's abstractions are very nearly landscapes, or at least include such hallmarks of the genre as horizon lines and sky-blue backdrops. The painter uses shadows and modeling to suggest a third dimension, and his compositions often include portal-like shapes. Like more traditional painters of more conventional scenes, Williams invites viewers to imagine walking right into the picture.

**J.T. Kirkland and Brian Williams:**  
"You Stumble Over the New



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