

IN THE GALLERIES

Artists put the 'gold' in 'Gold Rush'

BY MARK JENKINS

In icons and other classical religious paintings, gold leaf plays a paradoxical role: a substance prized for earthly value symbolizes otherworldly holiness. These days, the filmy metal is often used in nonsectarian work, including some of the paintings and mixed-media pieces in "Gold Rush," at the Mansion at Strathmore. But this show often evokes pious art, and one of the two participants, Thomas Xenakis, scatters traditional Christian icons among his other work.

Although born in Brooklyn and long based in D.C., Xenakis studied for two years in Greece, his ancestral homeland. Originally a medical illustrator, he mastered such venerable methods as fresco, encaustic and egg tempera, which he employs in literally iconic depictions of saints, prophets and martyrs. These small pictures balance the spartan and the sumptuous as they mix Greek and English text, and possess a stark beauty that should appeal to believers and skeptics alike.

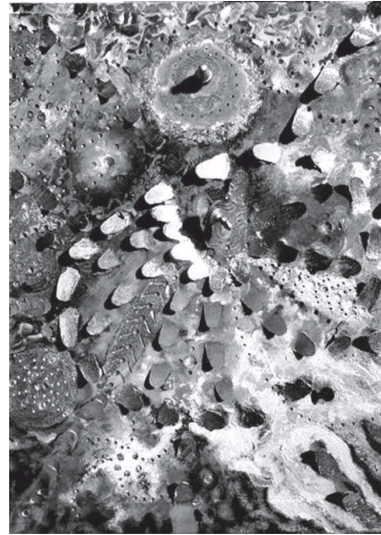
Xenakis also makes mixed-media abstractions on gilded paper or panels, creating depth by punching or stamping patterns in the metal and arraying other elements on top. One piece in this exuberant series, titled "XPYSO" after the Greek word for gold, includes a coiled lamp chain; others feature strands or clumps of golden wire. The artist utilizes many of the techniques he learned for icon painting, and the palette is similar. But where Xenakis's saints are austere, his XPYSO visions are ecstatic.

The other "Gold Rush" work is by Finland's Marita Liulia, whose many forms of expression include dance, theater, photography and painting. When researching a project about the world's major religions, she noticed that gold is revered universally.

Among Liulia's contributions are a film and several photographs, which include some of dancers in metallic



COURTESY THOMAS XENAKIS



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costumes and a variety of self-portraits. One shows the artist's hands covered in gold and red, revealing her painting technique. She swirls the pigment by hand across such large canvases and series as "Autumn," yielding pictures that are sweeping and spontaneous. They express moods or concepts, with an epic angularity that suggests El Greco. His appellation means, of course, "The Greek."

Gold Rush: Works by Marita Liulia and Thomas Xenakis. On view through July 27 at the Mansion at Strathmore, 10701 Rockville Pike, North Bethesda, Md., 301-581-5109. www.strathmore.org/fineartexhibitions.

Flesh & Bone

In classical nudes, private parts are often covered by draped fabric. A few of the 34 regional artists selected by Judy Byron for "Flesh & Bone: An Exhibition of Contemporary Figurative Art" have found a less elegant way to be modest: They depict people in their underwear, including one pair with a prominent Joe Boxer logo.

Product placement aside, this Hillier Art Space show is diverse. Nudity is presented as art history reference or matter-of-fact occurrence, as well as symbolic or kind of sexy. The range can be seen in just the photographs: Sarah Kaufman's "Untitled (Small Sunset)" shows an undraped young woman by a washing machine, her clothing on a drying rack. Bernis von zur Muehlen's "Back Torso with Hand" reveals weathered older flesh. Daniel Brooking's "Embrace Your Black Self" pairs a light-brown man with a charcoal-gray figure, masked and ghostly. Paul Kaller highlights a foot and Catherine Day a hand, while Ginny Huo hides a head behind a fan — a large electric one, not the hand-held variety.

The paintings include Shanye Huang's comic-book-like Asian beauty and Jenny Rappaport's split-panel portrayal of a cat and a showering woman, rendered in a funkier cartoonish style. A nude woman and a tree, representing the elm and the grapevine, entwine in a characteristically lyrical Micheline Klagsbrun picture, and Cindy Stockton Moore has drawn and

Thomas Xenakis's "XPYSO 181 Lost in Amazonia," above left, and "XPYSO 301 Pawn Universe," above right, are view at the Mansion at Strathmore.

Painted a cycle of swimmers and divers directly on the wall. It's an effective way to show something that classical poses don't always convey: The human body moves.

Flesh & Bone: An Exhibition of Contemporary Figurative Art. On view through July 26 at 9 Hillier Court NW; 202-338-0680; www.hillyerartspace.org.

Scott Hutchison, Andrea Cybyk, M. Jane Johnson and Mary Ellen Mogee

Motion is also the key to "In Sequence: Drawings, Paintings and Animations by Scott Hutchison," at Black Rock Center for the Arts. The Falls Church artist depicts his face and torso in photographs and video, but with close-ups of his eyes and mouth rendered in small, realistic oils. These paintings are displayed in grids, and are set in motion in such videos as "I Don't Know," which superimposes the 42 mouth paintings in succession over his face. It's a Socratic statement of ignorance by a guy who knows a few things about painting and stop-action animation.

Also at Black Rock, three Northern Virginia abstractionists demonstrate various ways to be boldly "Color Driven." Mary Ellen Mogee's acrylics suggest batik, and include such nature motifs as butterflies and salamanders. Andrea Cybyk also uses acrylic, but dilutes it to a watery consistency for spontaneous gestures, often on white backdrops. M. Jane Johnson's mixed-media collage paintings are creamier and more textured; when she employs white, it's overpainted to accent the juicy colors.

In Sequence: Drawings, Paintings and Animations by Scott Hutchison; Color Driven: Andrea Cybyk, M. Jane Johnson and Mary Ellen Mogee. On view through Aug. 1 at Black Rock Center for the Arts, 12901 Town Commons Dr., Germantown, Md.; 301-528-2260; www.blackrockcenter.org/galleries.

Billy Friebele

Erecting monuments has become problematic. Anything too literal, or too heroic, risks appearing trite. So local artist Billy Friebele used not one but two distancing strategies when making "U Street Chromatic (for Duke)," his memorial to Duke Ellington — and, specifically, the centennial of Duke's "Soda Fountain Rag." First, the images are nonrepresentational. Second, they were produced by a machine: a sensor-driven mechanical drummer and image-generator that translated street noise into both beats and drawings.

The result is a series of Etch-A-Sketch-like patterns, printed on paper or brushed silver and set off by bright, single-color backdrops. Also included are the funky machine itself and video of it in action at such locations as the Lincoln Theater, where the D.C.-bred jazzman used to perform. The mechanical nature of the piece is apt, since "Soda Fountain Rag" was inspired by an apparatus. But Friebele's riff seems impersonal, while Ellington's — shown in a large-format video — gives that soda-machine rhythm a human swing.

Billy Friebele: U Street Chromatic (for Duke). On view through Aug. 2 at Hamiltonian Gallery, 1353 U St. NW, Suite 101; 202-332-1116; www.hamiltoniangallery.com.

Jenkins is a freelance writer.

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JULY 20

LIONEL RICHIE
CEELO GREEN
All The Hits All Night Long
JULY 21 & 22

BIZET CARMEN
WOLF TRAP OPERA
NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Grant Gershon, conductor
The Washington Chorus
JULY 25

HEART
JULY 29

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA
WITH WYNTON MARSALIS

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BRUCE HORNSBY
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KISHI BASHI
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