

IN THE GALLERIES

Artworks show nature's fury and gentleness

BY MARK JENKINS

New Orleans artist Dan Tague has a distinctive vantage point on the American class divide: from waist deep in the waters of Hurricane Katrina. That flood has receded, of course, but is still a presence in his work. "Post Nihilist Utopia," Tague's show at Civilian Art Projects, includes "Made It Through That Water," a tempest of symbols. It's an inkjet print on two types of wood — upscale-condo oak on top and poverty-row pine on bottom — whose lower half was soaked in the Gulf of Mexico. Nine bent, rusty nails represent friends who died in the disaster.

The piece's motto is spelled out by Tague's trademark — an elaborately folded dollar bill. This selection includes such axioms, not all of them post-nihilist, perhaps, as "No Future" and "Not for Bribing Politicians." While the moneyed origami remains an effective gambit, some of Tague's newer wrinkles don't add much. He surrounds one of the dictums with bright stripes and partially embroiders another in pink yarn, but the central image is what registers. More strikingly, "Burn Baby Burn" is singed and "Center of the Universe" is dwarfed by a black void.

The gorilla in the room is literally a gorilla, sculpted of aluminum and fabricated in a hot-rod shop. It's painted in a peach-like shade that melds the skin tones of all 535 voting members of Congress. Perhaps Tague sees the ape as Capitol Hill's equivalent of Katrina: powerful and heedless.

Dan Tague: Post Nihilist Utopia On view through May 30 at Civilian Art Projects, 4718 14th St. NW. 202-607-3804. www.civilianartprojects.com.

Victor Ekpuk

Writing and painting merge in the art of Victor Ekpuk, whose bold work employs symbols from Nsibidi, a West African ideographic system. This is a familiar aspect of the Nigeria-born Washingtonian's style, but in Morton Fine Art's "Hip Sistas in Flux: The Visual-Lingual Braid" the text represents both contemporary modes and cultural heritage. The glyphs decorate bodies as well as backgrounds, suggesting African-inspired fabrics but also jewelry and piercings, tattoos and scarification.

Ekpuk often uses a dense field of black-on-white symbols to frame a person or object that's in color. Of these archetypal portraits,

however, only "Asian Uboikpa (Hip Sista) Series #6" is rendered in black, and it's garnished with red and blue dots at the center. The other paintings are even brighter, often outlining a woman's head and torso in a lighter hue than the backdrop. Sista #11, for example, uses thickly applied yellow atop a green and blue matrix. The vivid colors suit the primal images; these female exemplars are nothing if not robust.

Victor Ekpuk — Hip Sistas in Flux: The Visual-Lingual Braid On view through May 21 at Morton Fine Art, 1781 Florida Ave. NW. 202-628-2787. www.mortonfineart.com.

Stephanie Garney and David Brown & Jowita Wyszomirska

A little patch of wilderness in VisArts's Gibbs St. Gallery, Stephanie Garney's "Edge of the Forest" is inhabited by a deer, a woodchuck and even a bear. All are made of paper, albeit in different ways. The Maryland artist's show includes combined print/drawings of plants and animals in a realistic, highly detailed style. Other pieces add a third dimension, turning the likenesses into cut-paper sculptures finished with wax.

These include turtles and a heron that are part of "Wetlands," a tableau that's an entire little ecosystem, complete with lotus leaves and a 3-D outline of a canoe. Among the other pieces: simulated terrariums — lit from the inside — and small drawings affixed to slices of wood. Although Garney's work depicts the world more literally than a Zen garden, the motive is similar. Her interest, she writes, is "the slowing of time" by contemplating nature.

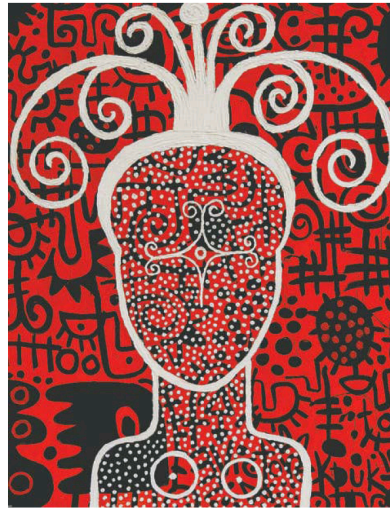
Upstairs at Kaplan Gallery, two Baltimore artists take a sparer approach in "Iterations." David Brown's large pieces on square, dark blue panels, one set of which bends around a corner, reiterate thousands of silver ovals; these hand-drawn, cell-like lozenges can ebb and flow or recur evenly. Brown also is showing simpler but related pieces whose backgrounds are black litho prints.

Jowita Wyszomirska draws her repeated motifs on Mylar, which she sometimes cuts to reveal drawings on the paper beneath. Her most elaborate work here is a large wall drawing, partially covered in lacy plastic shreds that cascade into the room. In this piece, tiny variations are amplified into a chaotic storm.

Stephanie Garney: Edge of the Forest and **David Brown & Jowita Wyszomirska: Iterations** On view through May 24 at Kaplan and Gibbs St. Galleries, VisArts at Rockville, 155 Gibbs St., Rockville, Md. 301-315-8200. www.visartscenter.org.

Steven Cushner

About six months ago, Steven Cushner set up a temporary studio in a storefront at 17th



VICTOR EKPUK/COURTESY OF MORTON FINE ART



ANNA U DAVIS/COURTESY OF HILLYER ART SPACE

Left: Nigerian-born Victor Ekpuk created "Asian Uboikpa (Hip Sista) Series #10," on display at Morton Fine Art. His work employs symbols from Nsibidi, a West African ideographic system.

Right: Anna U Davis's "Men," at Hillyer Art Space. Her paintings are part of "Pulse15," a fundraising affordable art by 15 artists. The selection is mostly prints, photographs and drawings.

and L streets NW, where he worked on a few paintings that were larger than his own studio could accommodate. Those canvases also are too big for Hemphill Fine Arts, where "Cushner" is on display. But the show does include many pieces with similar motifs and a kindred style. Whether acrylic on canvas or watercolor on paper, the pictures abstract natural forms and contrast hard-edged forms with fluid, drippy gestures.

One of the paintings is titled "Veil," recalling a series of that name by Morris Louis of the Washington Color School. But the painting that comes closest to Louis's multilayered "Veils" is "Spring Flower," whose diverse hues blend into an earthy brown. It's the only picture from 2015, and in form echoes one of the larger works from the storefront stint. Other pieces, notably "In the Valley" and "Up and Down," are more colorful, while "Wave-length" seems to emphasize undulating ripples over its other aspects. A closer look, though, reveals that its seemingly black backdrop is actually a heavily worked cloak of multiple veils. This painting, too, pits simple shapes against complex textures.

Cushner On view through May 30 at Hemphill Fine Arts, 1515 14th St. NW. 202-234-5601. www.hemphillfinearts.com.

Jaanka Peerna and Pulse15

Lines curve through the air, or bristle in a void, in Jaanka Peerna's "Light Matter." The

New York-based Estonian artist draws free-hand with pencil on Mylar, sometimes on a vast scale: The largest piece in her show at Hillyer Art Space arcs from ceiling to floor, occupying about half the gallery in which it's installed. In addition to its grand size and unusual shape, the drawing most conspicuously highlights the red marks that embellish Peerna's mainly graphite-gray strokes. Yet the most striking picture is from the "Maelstroms Series," in which she rotates her right arm freely to create a dense flurry of lines. The results are delicate yet dynamic.

Also at Hillyer is "Pulse15," a fundraising show featuring affordable art by 15 artists. The selection is mostly prints, photographs and drawings, including handsome work by Fawna Xaio and Michelle Klagsbrun. Sculptors Lauren Frances Evans and Jeff Herry are showing intriguingly surrealistic assemblages, while Anna U Davis's paintings and Jordanna Kalman's photos offer more nudity and eroticism than might be expected. The most lustful scenarios, though, are in the staged photos of Bridget Sue Lambert, whose protagonists are plastic dolls.

Jaanka Peerna: Light Matter and **Pulse15** On view through May 30 at Hillyer Art Space, 9 Hillyer Ct. NW. 202-338-0325. www.hillyerartspace.org. style@washpost.com

Jenkins is a freelance writer.

MAY 22 & 23

A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION WITH GARRISON KEILLOR AND SPECIAL GUESTS: SARA WATKINS SARAH JAROSZ AOIFE O'DONOVAN

MAY 30

KOOL & THE GANG CHAKA KHAN

JUNE 3

INGRID MICHAELSON JUKEBOX THE GHOST OH HONEY

JUNE 5

THE B-52s BERLIN

JUNE 6

AN EVENING WITH THE CREATORS OF SERIAL: SARAH KOENIG & JULIE SNYDER

JUNE 7

WOLF TRAP'S 26TH ANNUAL LOUISIANA SWAMP ROMP™ ALLEN TOUSSAINT REBIRTH BRASS BAND PINE LEAF BOYS

JUNE 16

DAVID GRAY AMOS LEE

JUNE 20

CELTIC WOMAN 10TH ANNIVERSARY WORLD TOUR

TICKETS ON SALE NOW



"WEIRD AL" YANKOVIC
THE MANDATORY WORLD TOUR

JUNE 12



STEVE MILLER BAND

JUNE 17



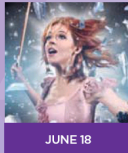
TCHAIKOVSKY'S 1812 OVERTURE
EMANUEL AX PLAYS BRAHMS
NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
ANDREW LITTON, CONDUCTOR

JUNE 21



THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE
NEW YORK GILBERT & SULLIVAN PLAYERS

JUNE 13



LINDSEY STIRLING
THE MUSIC BOX TOUR

JUNE 18



AUDRA McDONALD
NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
ANDY EINHORN, CONDUCTOR

JUNE 22



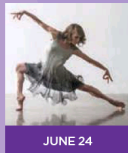
CLASSIC ALBUMS LIVE PRESENTS
THE BEATLES - ABBEY ROAD

JUNE 14



BACK TO THE FUTURE
NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
BILL DE COOL, CONDUCTOR
™ & © Universal Studios and U-Drive Joint Venture

JUNE 19



HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO

JUNE 24

AND MANY MORE!

WOLFTRAP.ORG ▶ 1.877.WOLFTRAP

NOW!

PNC PREMIER SPONSOR
2015 SUMMER SEASON

WOLF TRAP
SUMMER 2015