

IN THE GALLERIES

An early spring is always welcome

BY MARK JENKINS

Spring has arrived early in area galleries, which are budding with floral imagery. Not all of it is soft and delicate. The majority of the works in Addison/Ripley Fine Art's "Branched" is by Julia Bloom, who arranges bare twigs into latticelike forms. These are the inspiration for her charcoal drawings, some of which climb higher than the sculptures.

The D.C. artist's model is the forest, where trees divide space, diffuse light and cast shifting shadows. Yet Bloom's wired-together constructions can resemble buildings as much as baskets or birdcages, and are sometimes painted in bright, artificial colors. "Clear Forest #5 Gray" is a leaning tower of sorts, and most of the sticks in the wall-mounted "Abacus" are vivid blue.

Although Bloom's drawings essentially depict her sculptures, they have a different feel. The hard edges are sometimes softened by smeary grays, and perspective deftly simulates the dimensions of the twig-built grids. The seven-foot-high "Monolith 3" evokes misty depths with gray-on-gray gestures and has nearly the presence of a 3-D piece.

"Branched" also features Jackie Battenfield's paintings, in which silhouetted trunks and twigs are embellished with leaves and flowers. From a distance, these vignettes appear realistic. But the New York artist paints with watery acrylics on Mylar panel, so the pigment flows and pools, and yields accidental patterns when it dries. Usually executed in just two or three colors, Battenfield's pictures are part minimalist and part abstract. And yet they convey nature's serene aspects.

Branched: Jackie Battenfield and Julia Bloom On view through March 4 at Addison/Ripley Fine Art, 1670 Wisconsin Ave. NW. 202-338-5180. addisonripleyfineart.com.

Kiki McGrath & Jean Jinho Kim

Swirls of green suggest the



Jackie Battenfield's "Tending Tender" (2016), acrylic on Mylar panel, on view through March 4 at Addison/Ripley Fine Art.

JACKIE BATTENFIELD/ADDISON/RIPLLEY FINE ART

botanical origins of Kiki McGrath's expressionist abstractions, but the local artist also has drawn on another source, examples of which are part of this Studio Gallery show. Alongside the paintings, "Aerial Roots" displays three sculptures inspired by ikebana — Japanese flower-arranging — and made by local devotees of the art form.

These are large, burly and far from traditional. Rather than dainty flowers and grasses, the assemblages feature log-size branches and unnatural accents; one incorporates chunks of vine painted orange. With them, McGrath has installed a black rubber hose, coiled and hanging in midair. The shape of this gardening accessory echoes the spirals in the paintings and pays an amusing tribute to ikebana. The found-object sculpture is not flower-arranging, but it is an act of transformation, and that's a fundamental theme of Japanese art.

Downstairs, Jean Jinho Kim

has clustered everyday objects in ways that complement "Aerial Roots." The Leesburg artist's "No Boundaries" is more far-ranging, but it does include glittering mock butterflies and — in a piece titled "Garden 1 60-12" — two roselike blooms. If Kim's assemblages include many industrial materials, there is a hint of ikebana amid the car parts and LEDs.

Kiki McGrath: Aerial Roots and Jean Jinho Kim: No Boundaries On view through Feb. 25 at Studio Gallery, 2108 R St. NW. 202-232-8734. studiogallerydc.com.

These Flowers . . .

Botanical illustration is such a specific calling that the Corcoran used to award a certificate in it. The 11 artists in Adah Rose Gallery's current show, members of the local Studio 155 cooperative, all participated in

that program. The paintings and drawings in "These Flowers Are Like the Pleasures of the World," do include a few non-vegetal subjects, ranging from small (snails) to vast (the Grand Canyon). But most depict flowers, fruits and vegetables with academic precision.

Indeed, among the drawings are Wendy W. Cortesi's "process" pieces, which catalogue the visual and scientific aspects of plants she's preparing to render in watercolor. Other artists add drama with black backdrops, giving their paintings an Old Master vibe, or with implied action; Donald Beekman Myer pictures fruit such as lemons and pears, tumbling like dice. Most ominous is Roberta Matthews Bernstein's series on toxic plants, pretty but potentially fatal. The skull and crossbones painted on the side of one canvas warn that botanical art is not for the timid.

These Flowers Are Like the Pleasures of the World On view through Feb. 25 at Adah Rose Gallery, 3766 Howard Ave., Kensington, Md. 301-922-0162. adahrosegallery.com.

Mary D. Ott

"Metallics," the title of Mary D. Ott's show at Touchstone Gallery, refers to her use of gold, silver and copper paint and ink. But the subject of the Silver Spring artist's paintings and prints is not metal but grass, a longtime interest. Wispy blades are conjured with embroidery yarn dipped into pigment to produce hundreds of lines, usually vertical. The resulting image could be an unknown lawn, a wild prairie or merely an exercise in color and form.

The metallic hues give the paintings an undulating glow that suggests daybreak or sunset. The prints lack that luminosity,

but they're just as compelling. Ott uses string much as she does thread in the paintings, drawing lines on a plate that's then etched. The elegant "Wide Grass" series renders meadows in blue and silver, and "Grass Bouquet VI" contrasts lacy, detailed fronds in black with looser shapes in reddish brown. This is the meadow as a minimalist Eden, a place of narrow yet infinite variety.

Metallics: Paintings and Prints by Mary D. Ott On view through Feb. 26 at Touchstone Gallery, 901 New York Ave. NW. 202-347-2787. touchstonegallery.com.

Blaise Tobia

Among some stern sects, austerity is required in public only. Opening the door to a private space reveals that different rules apply. That's true, Blaise Tobia's "Plain & Fancy" demonstrates, even of such seemingly utilitarian objects as the horse-drawn carriages of Pennsylvania's Amish. Inside the stark black or gray exteriors are bright colors, textured carpet and other unexpected decorative touches.

The Hillyer Art Space show consists of twinned photos of in and out, both in close-up. Tobia made the images, but the Philadelphia artist doesn't consider himself primarily a photographer. He's concerned more with contrasting found forms than with documentary storytelling (although he does allow glimpses of Amish life, visible in the background or reflected in windows). Although the backstory is intriguing, the diptychs would work even if their subject were unknown. The juxtaposition of asceticism and flamboyance reflects human contradictions far beyond Lancaster County.

Blaise Tobia: Plain & Fancy On view through Feb. 26 at Hillyer Art Space, 9 Hillyer Ct. NW. 202-338-0325. hillyerartspace.org. style@washpost.com

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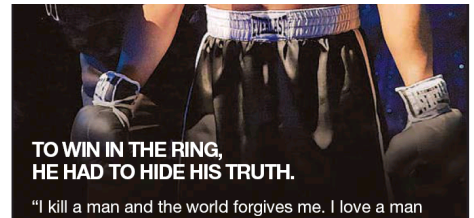
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