

# Jana Brike's 'Sea of Change' exhibition sets the voyage on a different course

BY MARK JENKINS

One of the National Gallery of Art's more cinematic holdings is Thomas Cole's "The Voyage of Life," a four-painting suite. The 1842 parable stars a traveler, solitary except for guardian angels, who negotiates a small boat from boyhood to old age. Imagine the same allegorical journey, but featuring women, animals and such contemporary ephemera as a SpongeBob SquarePants balloon. That's Jana Brike's "Sea of Change," most of which is now on display at IA&A at Hillyer.

Bigger and busier than Cole's series, Brike's eight-painting sequence is populated by renderings of 32 nearly life-size girls and women. The supremely adept Latvian artist's pictures are six feet high and either eight or 11½ feet wide. That's too much oil-daubed square footage for the gallery, which has space for only six of them. Reproductions of the other two can be seen in the show's catalogue, published by International Arts & Artists, the venue's parent organization.

Rather than sail life's ocean, Brike's figures walk in the surf (presumably the Baltic). They're flocked by birds, accompanied by a white mare and carrying pink flowers, party balloons and a tiger cub. The women and girls are of various ethnicities and frequently nude or partly clothed. Rather than angels, Brike presents two women with small wings drawn on their naked backs. The message is feminist, but the vibe is Victorian, specifically Pre-Raphaelite. The seeming goal is to return to classical virtues and symbols, tempered by a modern woman's sensibility.

Brike has traveled in Asia, and here includes a baba yoga, an aged Indian savant and a dress embellished with "The Great Wave," the best-known image of the 19th-century Japanese artist Hokusai (now the subject of a Freer Gallery show). But the influence of edgy Japanese pop artists such as Yoshitoma Nara, previously hinted in Brike's style, has vanished.

The artist's pictures of

adolescent women, some of them apparently self-portraits, used to feature scraped flesh and distorted features and proportions. "Sea of Change" is tidier and prettier. The series alludes to conflict and death, yet its imagery is too sugared to sting. The panel that includes a skull nestles it in a basket next to a pair of white kittens.

**Jana Brike: Sea of Change**  
Through Dec. 15 at IA&A at Hillyer, 9 Hillyer Ct. NW.

## All Together Now

There's not a single representational artist among the six contributors to De Novo Gallery's "All Together Now," and yet most of the works engage somehow with the visible world. The participants, all based in Washington, both draw from and

defy the principles of mid-20th-century abstraction.

Photographer Dean Kessmann finds color, pattern and depth along local streets, grabbing vignettes that include graffiti and foliage. Rex Delafkaran uses traditional ceramic techniques to make nonfunctional vessels that further blur usual ideas of form by melding with their pine supports. Tom Bunnell paints small oils that are actually more layered than their simple surfaces promise.

The closest thing to a realist in this crew, Matthew Mann paints actual things precisely but emphasizes patterns and surrealist winks. His "Threat Lemon" places the shape of an oblong yellow fruit in one corner, mirrored by a barely visible blue counterpart in another. Adrienne Gaither's hard-edge color-field takes subtle cues from

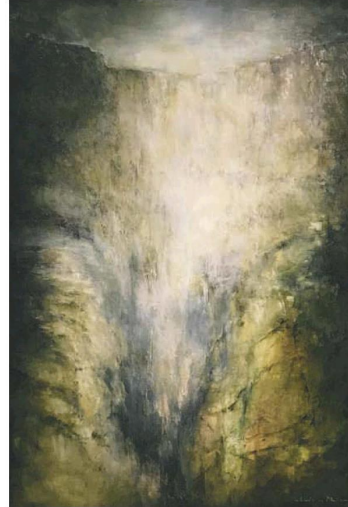
the real world. Her "Cigarette Pants" places narrow white stripes on a red background, with rippling textures that quietly disrupt the flat forms.

The most unexpected entries are by Nara Park, who has used lightweight, synthetic materials to erect structures that appeared to be stone and brick. Her new pieces are covered in small, colored plastic foam beads to suggest heathered wool or multicolored sand. Park's work is still faux-architectural, but she now uses plastic bits to simulate the roughness of materials forged by geological forces.

**All Together Now** Through Dec. 14 at De Novo Gallery, 1287 Fourth St. NE (entrance on Neal Place).



RUSSELL BILES/ THE DISTRICT CLAY CENTER & GALLERY  
**Russell Biles's sculpture of a bloodied turtle and skull-headed eagle is a parable of European colonization of the Americas.**



LINDSAY MULLEN/CALLOWAY FINE ART AND CONSULTING  
**In painter Lindsay Mullen's "Translating Landscape, Icelandic Waterfall," the misty cascade appears to glow.**

automated assassination. Hundreds of tiny figures, their heads drops of A, B, AB or O, assemble to protest the ban on gay people's donation of blood.

Those turtles also bear messages. A beautifully rendered pairing of bloodied turtle and skull-headed eagle is a parable of European colonization of the Americas. Biles also offers a sculpture of a little girl atop a box turtle in which the shell's pattern has migrated to the child's face and hands. It's a vision of rapport with nature that's also a celebration of human virtuosity.

**Russell Biles: Subversive Nature**  
Through Dec. 14 at District Clay Gallery, 2414 Douglas St. NE.

## Lindsay Mullen

The neoimpressionist paintings in Lindsay Mullen's "Adaptive Measures" conjure haze, earth and, above all, light. What's less obvious is that the subtly gradated oils also represent "terror and despair," according to the brochure for the Susan Calloway Fine Arts show.

Those feelings are psychological side effects of climate change, whose consequences the painter has observed in vulnerable locales such as Iceland. A British-born artist who divides her time between Washington and the Spanish island of Menorca, Mullen is as inspired by ecological concerns as by J.M.W. Turner's near-abstract 19th-century land- and seascapes.

The world is not on fire in her pictures, which mostly forgo bright colors and deep blacks. Nearly all are horizontal, sometimes extremely, although she does flip the prevailing format for a depiction of a waterfall whose misty cascade appears to glow. The rush of meltwater may be ominous, but Mullen is also alert to its beauty.

**Lindsay Mullen: Adaptive Measures** Through Dec. 14 at Susan Calloway Fine Arts, 1643 Wisconsin Ave. NW.

style@washpost.com