

IN THE GALLERIES

In this exhibition, artists talk through their hats

BY MARK JENKINS

Sometimes, a hat is just a hat. But not this month at Studio Gallery, where "Hats Off: Taking Art Outside the Gallery" entertainingly juxtaposes works by area artists with the toppers they made for local collector Steven Krensky. Most are light-colored fedoras embellished with designs that exemplify the artists' styles, yet a few toy with the very idea of a hat. Krensky curated the show, drawing on more than 50 lids made for him over the past 15 years.

The cap is integral to the piece in the gallery's window — Stephen Hay's life-size sculpture of a seated musician. Krensky (or the artist herself) has playfully turned one of Sondra Arkin's wire-sculpture "shadow drawings" into a hat rack for a chapeau flocked with shapes like the ones in the adjacent Arkin piece. Tory Cowles's distinctive, broad-brimmed number, made of two very differently shaped pieces of metal, would be ideal for a flat-headed robot. The bulkiest headpiece is Alison Sigethy's diving helmet, displayed next to two mixed-media pieces that evoke oceanic depths, one with lights and the other with actual water.

Many of the hats are decorated with pictures of animals, from ants to an elephant. There's a Disney cartoon lion atop Nancy Nesvet's pink "Hear Pussy Roar," and two fedoras with ancient Egyptian totems next to Malik Lloyd's blackboard lesson in the Afrocentric interpretation of Pharaonic Egypt. Nearby — geographically, if not chronologically — Helen Zughaib's brightly striped entry complements a picture of a woman who has perched a fancy dress hat atop her black shroud.

Among the abstractionists who successfully transfer their work from flat to shaped fabric are Joan Belmar and Pat Goslee; his circles and dashed lines and her vivid biomorphic forms suit the hats' contours. (Goslee is married to Washington Post reporter Michael O'Sullivan.) Yet

most of the artists, perhaps inspired by the practical nature of their assigned canvas, take a representational approach. That includes Songmi Heart, who tweaked the rules charmingly by painting three pairs of shoes: one with autumn leaves, another with summer grass and the last with toes. After all, when taking art out of the gallery, footwear is even more important than headgear.

Hats Off: Taking Art Outside the Gallery Through Jan. 27 at Studio Gallery, 2108 R St. NW, 202-232-8734. studiogallerydc.com.

Ito, McFarland & Isenberg

The past is seared into the present in the photographs of



TORY COWLES/STUDIO GALLERY

Kei Ito, whose "Only What We Can Carry" is the largest of three shows at IA&A at Hillyer. The show's title refers to the few possessions allowed Japanese residents and Japanese American citizens when they were sent to U.S. internment camps during World War II. But Ito's technique, which yields coronas and silhouettes in the colors of flame and char, also evokes the fire- and nuclear-bomb devastation inflicted on Japan at the end of its campaign to subjugate Asia.

The Tokyo-born, Baltimore-based Ito is the grandson of a man who lived through the incineration of Hiroshima. That legacy is palpable in this show, even though it's not directly addressed. Most of the pieces are X-ray-like photos of U.S. government documents about

Tory Cowles, "967 Electric," mixed media, on view in "Hats Off: Taking Art Outside the Gallery" at Studio Gallery.

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the establishment and administration of the internment camps. Superimposed over these are such simple objects as a passport, a notebook and chopsticks. Sometimes highlighted are hands and items that didn't exist in the 1940s, including a laptop. They seem to represent the ongoing history of families whose lives were disrupted in the 1940s. Also on display is "Infertile American Dream," several floor-mounted photos produced by a similar process on a single day: Nov. 8, 2016. The pictures glow ominously, as if Election Day was another Hiroshima, or at least a Fukushima.

Different sorts of scars are memorialized in Grant McFarland's "Residuals," which consists of several sculptural installations. The D.C. artist assembles wood, stone and metal from abandoned mines, farms and small factories in eastern Upstate New York, where he recently did a residency. He arranges the pieces to invoke obsolete industries and their lingering impact on the landscape (a bit of which can be seen in a video glimpsed through a wooden window frame). A metal clock on the wall suggests that it's time to get back to work, but there's nothing to be done.

In a darkened room between Ito and McFarland's shows, Monroe Isenberg's "Lighthouse" strikes a more meditative tone. The local artist's sculpture consists of a large steel pyramid lit from the inside. The piece dangles, inverted, in the middle of the space, emitting light through its cut-off tip. From a distance, viewers also can see light that's reflected on the wall and bobbles like gentle waves. Rather than send a beacon across a menacing sea, this structure holds both motion and illumination within itself.

Kei Ito: Only What We Can Carry; Grant McFarland: Residuals; and Monroe Isenberg: Lighthouse Through Jan. 28 at IA&A at Hillyer, 9 Hillyer Ct. NW, 202-338-0325.

athillyer.org. Ito and others will discuss "Art in Context: Japan" at noon Jan. 24. Free; RSVP required.

BD Richardson

Maryland photographer BD Richardson is not locked into any one theme, locale or mode. The pictures in her Touchstone Gallery show, "Mosaic: Moments & Methods," are derived from digital sources as well as from film. But she does have a feel for the historical and the timeless, which she evokes with 19th-century techniques (salt printing) or simulated ones (transferring images to weathered metal plates to yield what she calls "new age 'tintypes'").

The majority of the show's photos are black-and-white or sepia-toned, which befits subjects such as battered lone buildings (often churches) on wide plains under turbulent clouds. Richardson visited China in the 1980s, and many of her images of that country in that moment — not long ago, yet so far from its contemporary boom — are monochromatic. She also signifies distance by using muted colors, both in her China pictures and in views of an often-snowy Paris. Occasionally, bright colors pop from a subdued milieu, as in a picture of watermen's buckets and gloves, their plastic hues incongruously hot on a chilly gray day.

A few seascapes include electric orange skies, and there's semiabstract botanicals in lustrous pinks and purples. But a gentler, slightly faded look suits her deftly framed vignettes, even the ones with such brawny elements as vast skies and rows of big, black trees. Richardson's taste for outdated photographic methods mirrors her penchant for focusing on lost times and places.

BD Richardson: Mosaic: Moments & Methods Through Jan. 28 at Touchstone Gallery, 901 New York Ave. NW, 202-347-2787. touchstonegallery.com.

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