

Juried art exhibition opens at Gertrude Herbert Institute

The 36th annual juried art exhibition opened recently at the Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art in Augusta. As has been the case in the past, the theme for this year's competition, open to artists from around the country, is "sense of place."

The appropriateness of this unifying theme is self-evident. Indeed, the term "sense of place" has geographical, psychological, and sociological associations; and thus it offers a wide range of possible artistic interpretations. The 42 artists represented in this exhibition admirably explore all three categories of meaning.

Let's begin our survey by tackling some of the works that respond to "place" in its geographical sense. Bucolic beauty is explored in Lisa Brody's oil "Birches," a study in the patterns formed by closely spaced tree trunks and interlacing branches set against a snowy backdrop. For those who like their nature more verdant, David Titterington's "Secreted" offers an emerald green world, with a posing frog in the left foreground and a naked male figure in the distance on the right. Front and center, however, is a massive tree whose root system seems to offer the promise of sanctuary to a host of living things.

If your visual pleasures are most often found in urban settings, John Dean's colored inkjet print entitled "Buford Highway Map Key" offers an abundance of stimulation. The top half of this two-part image features folded paper representations of the businesses that make up a specialized shopping center on a stretch of commercial roadway in the Greater Atlanta area while the bottom half presents in a grid the names or neon symbols featured on the facades of the mixed Asian and Latino businesses in that location. A strip mall of long-standing in Doraville, Georgia, Asian Square obviously evoked a



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response from the artist, who was bedazzled by the eye-popping colors and eye-catching graphics.

Some works merge the geographical and the psychological. The photograph by Carrie and Eric Tomberlin entitled "Locally Produced Concrete Blocks to Reinforce Embankments" focuses on an outdoor space covered, as the title indicates, with concrete blocks, all molded and set out to cure in June 2014. With little space between each, the blocks form a perforated surface across which it is possible to walk if one steps carefully. Thus, in this image, which won the designation "Best of Show," a young barefoot boy balances on a single makeshift stepping stone while a female figure in a sari forges forward, intent on traversing the space regardless of its man-made challenges.

The image poses a number of questions about space, both external and internal. How much have man-made structures changed the face of our planet? How perilous are the paths that we find in life?

Psychology or the exploration of inner space is paramount in some pieces. Consider the pen and ink rendering by Art Vandenberg entitled "Quantum Differentiation Shield." Using some of the ideas stemming from the study of quantum geometry, the artist has created an ever-expanding spiral composed of individual segments. To the right of this central image is a "key" to the 11 basic designs used to fill in each segment of the spiral. The application of these registered designs, however, is non-commutative. Thus,



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The front facade of the Gertrude Herbert Institute.

the principal figure, which swirls out from a central core, appears to be the largely subconscious product of random accretion.

Spanning the psychological and the sociological are works that focus on the human figure. Indeed, our personal sense of place is often informed by the presence of others. This explains the inclusion in this year's juried exhibition of a very accomplished portrait entitled "Brother Dearest." A work in oil by H.E. Ramage, the likeness of a young man in three-quarter pose is not just a study in close observation. Indeed, the viewer cannot confine his speculation to just the surface level; as with the best of portraiture, we feel compelled to push forward to plumb secrets of the psyche or in-

ner space. What exactly is on the sitter's mind?

Visitors to the Gertrude Herbert Institute in the next month – the show runs to Oct. 14 – will enjoy examining the many ways the 47 paintings, drawings, prints, photographs and sculptures approach the concept of "sense of place." Located at 506 Telfair St., the main gallery of the Gertrude Herbert is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, call 706-722-5495 or visit the Institute on the web.

A recipient of both the Governor's Award in the Humanities and the Carolina Trustee Professorship, **Dr. Tom Mack** holds the rank of Distinguished Professor Emeritus at USC Aiken.