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Southeast Texas art museum showcasing contemporary Texas female artists

By **Andy Coughlan**, *Contributor*
Nov 26, 2022

Installation shot of the Art Museum of Southeast Texas "Contemporary Texas Women Artists: Abstraction Here and Now," on display through Dec. 23.
Photo by Andy Coughlan

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What is abstraction? The dictionary definition is artwork that is non-representational. But really, what does that mean? Art, by its very nature, represents something — a feeling, an emotion, a memory.

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The works on display at the Art Museum of Southeast exhibition “Contemporary Texas Women Artists: Abstraction Here and Now,” on display through Dec. 23 explores the wide range of abstract art. The exhibition features 11 artists who live within a 200-mile radius of Beaumont, Erika Alonso, Adela Andea, Claire Ankenman, Emma Balder, Pat Colville, Orna Feinstein, Liz Gates, Abhidnya Ghuge, Bethany Johnson, Melinda Laszczynski and Leila McConnell.

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From painting to sculpture to collage, and even neon tubes, the exhibition is a wide-ranging overview of what constitutes abstraction. The artists' works are mostly spread throughout the gallery rather than grouping them by artist. This allows the pieces to be in dialogue with each other.

Adela Andea's "Rapscallious Organoid System" dominates the exhibition by its sheer size. The site-specific installation is a tangled web of wires and material and neon tubing that literally climbs the walls of the gallery. It is like being immersed inside a body and watching organisms floating around. Anyone who has seen the 1966 movie "Fantastic Voyage" will share the feeling of being miniaturized.

Much of the gallery explodes in color, but Liz Gates' pieces are, for the most part, white on white. The three works on the far wall are composed of embossing items, including can tabs, into the white paper to create an indented abstract pattern. "Co-emergence" features a collage of white diapers. One immediately understands that she is subverting the view of motherhood as defining women.

Gates also works in color, and “If it wasn’t this it would be something else” is a beautiful collage of fragments from daily life — fabrics and yarn, what looks like a menu. The viewer is invited to ponder the minutiae that makes up a person’s experiences.

Gates “something else” works perfectly with Leila McConnell’s small collages and Bethany Johnson’s constructions which form a cohesive unit.

McConnell’s collages are small but evoke grand landscapes, with their overlapping shapes. Johnson’s small, assembled sculptures resemble stratum, allowing us the see the layers as the artist builds. As such, we see the history of the piece in the same way we see the history of the earth through geological inspection.

All of the artists represented have pieces that connect with the viewer in various ways. As is often the case with group shows, different pieces connect in different ways according to the mood of the viewer. The show is configured in such a way as to reward multiple viewings. On another day a different piece will speak to us.

Erika Alonso’s pieces are a bit of a cheat. Rather than pure abstraction, a keen eye will see figures and faces peeking out of the vibrant and dynamic brush strokes. Abstraction is defined as devoid of representational forms, yet Alonso suggests the representational, pushing the boundaries of abstraction, which is, after all, the basis of art. What is art if not testing the limits of a form?

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Among the other standouts are Emma Balder's "Winds Drawings," which are marvelously organic and flowing, as well as her soft sculpture, "Interference With Fate," which truly embraces the concept of mixed media to produce a relief wall-hanging sculpture.

As I write this, other works which I had thought to simply mention begin to seep into my consciousness. Orna Feinstein's fabric and mesh compositions are consistently attractive, and I would be remiss if I did not mention Abhidnya Ghuge's wonderful "Above the Thunderstorm."

If nothing else, I hope this sums up the difficulty of reviewing a show like this. One wants to mention all the artists' works, but to do so would necessitate a longer essay than is reasonable.

As with all reviews, just go and see the exhibition. More than once if possible. Take time to enjoy art in all its forms. Each visit rewards in different ways.

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The Art Museum of Southeast Texas is located at 500 Main St. in downtown Beaumont. For more, visit amset.org.

Nov 26, 2022

Andy Coughlan

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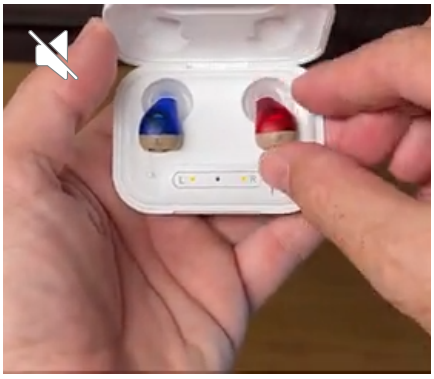

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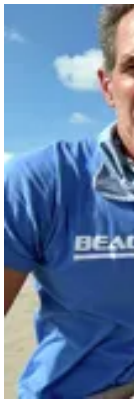

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