

New PS:Gallery show suits the season with cool colors, subtle glories



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A collection of abstract paintings by Carlos Michael Finn hang on the wall at the PS:Gallery as part of the gallery's autumn exhibit. The gallery features paintings, photography, sculpture, wood carvings, jewelry, fiber, ceramics and glass — one painting on the ground even boasts wheels.

By [Jill Renae Hicks](#)

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The last vestiges of Indian summer have presented themselves in the form of 80-degree temperatures over the past couple of weeks, so it is not entirely inappropriate to dream of wide-open spaces and carnival traces before the relentless cascade of holiday happenings tears into our waking hours. Luckily, the space at Perlow-Stevens Gallery is poised to let viewers relish the remaining bits of warmth while moving us into a season of joy and anticipation.

Slide Show



[Perlow-Stevens Gallery Art Exhibit](#)

UNDISCLOSED LOCATIONS AND BACKYARD BEAUTY

“This show is fairly photography-heavy,” said Jennifer Perlow, co-owner and curator of PS:Gallery. “But they’re really different styles of photography.” Columbia native Notley Hawkins’ work is vivid and high-contrast, making use of unusual angles; Chris Dahlquist, from Kansas City, brought in art that is cooler and has a faraway, misted-over look to it. Her work graces the east front end of the gallery. Dahlquist typically transfers photographs onto painted steel. Her work has historically had gold tinges to it, creating a warmer, nostalgic feel on the metal. This time, however, her new series, “Terra Nullius,” uses silver paint on steel instead of gold, creating a cooler mood for each piece.

The effect is striking. Photographs of roads from Dahlquist’s crisscrossing U.S. travels are depicted in streaked, hazy glamour: blue skies, prairie and brush smoothed across the bottoms of each frame and unapologetic bursts of white-gray clouds looming overhead.

One thing missing in this exhibit, as opposed to a typical PS: show, is that there is no artwork hanging in the window to the right of the front door. It is because Perlow wants people to come in and see how Dahlquist’s art changes so much with the light, she said. “They are very quiet and still and lovely. . . . Her intent is to take away enough so that you stop asking where it is. It’s recognizable as a landscape, but it’s not so literal a translation” that the viewer begins to try to discern the location of each photo.

“I am inspired by the deafening concrete of my urban home, and the invisibility created by the cul-de-sacs of my youth,” Dahlquist said in her artist statement. “The possibilities offered in the big sky, the open land, the space between. The untold stories sitting on the horizon. The miles I travel, dreaming and being still.”

Moving back through the sky-and-road serenity of Dahlquist’s work, the viewer comes upon Hawkins’ oversized and multifaceted photography. From snow-laden railroads at twilight, to historic buildings in the early morning, to the mysteries and idiosyncrasies of a country carnival at dusk, to fields couched in fog and mystery, only occasionally uncovering their secrets — Hawkins captures recognizable scenes of Mid-Missouri life in which many forget to see beauty, and he turns each scene on its head to capture something entirely new.

“I would say the subject matter is my ‘backyard’ — any place that I can drive to in a reasonable amount of time,” Hawkins said in a phone interview. “I draw inspiration from what’s around me and where I live.”

The carnival is a favorite motif of Hawkins; he has made artwork centering on carnivals for 20 or 30 years, he said. Before he took up photography, he made paintings at carnivals. In fact, his bachelor’s and master’s degrees are in painting. He never took a photography class as part of his studies, but around 2005, Hawkins began shooting photos and posting them to an online Flickr account to use them for compositional and location studies for his paintings.

The response to his photos was positive, and after a while, he began to think, “‘Why not just do the photos as the artwork itself?’” Hawkins recalled. He made use of his connections with people in the art world to begin

publishing photos online, in magazines and in newspapers. He recently also sold a group of his works to the newly created IBM facility in town.

Hawkins will often come across an ideal location for photos, but the time of day or the season isn't quite right. "I just keep a lot of locations in my head" to return to, he explained. Hawkins also plans long-exposure shots using flashlights with colored gels to create eerie colors in unexpected places: the hood of an abandoned car or the porch of a dilapidated farmhouse.

Photography has "reinvigorated my career as an artist," Hawkins said.

ROCKETMEN AND CHILDLIKE LIBERTY

Joel Sager, PS: artist in residence, returns with a series more akin to some of his older work than his most recent series of foggy landscapes and high-contrast portraits. Perhaps not anywhere else in the exhibit are the earthy colors of autumn expressed with such understated glory than in his work "Drying Mums on a Plaster Wall." Other paintings function as tarred, wallpapered snapshots of suspenseful stories yet to be told: a suitcase with a lone tie sticking out in "On the Lam" and a hanger left on the floor in "It's All Fun and Games."

Circling back around the carefully positioned movable walls of the gallery, Jimmy Descant of Salida, Colo. — also known as "Rocketman" — offers a series of whimsical, steampunkish and eclectic machine art. Each sculpture is bolted onto a pan or tray to be mounted on the wall; Descant never uses welding, preferring to repurpose old bolts and screws. His assemblage art was first inspired by his observation of an older Kenmore vacuum and "its creator's creative, anonymous streamlined lines," he remarked in his artist statement.

"He said when he drives from the Midwest back to Denver, it takes him sometimes days because he stops at every little thrift store and flea market," Perlow said. Small objects that don't fit in Descant's larger pieces are shimmed into metal-encased heart-shaped sculptures, and mounted on smaller pans and appropriately named "Robot Hearts."

Winding back toward the front of the gallery, Carlos Michael Finn, another Coloradan, ushered in paintings of immense size and unequivocally bold colors — the boldest of the autumn 2011 exhibit, perhaps. Geometric, bulbous shapes are fashioned by convergent lines scratched, scrawled or painted. The artist takes cans of paint and uses barbecue skewers to spread it across each canvas, Perlow said. Some canvases have been painted over multiple times; she added it is difficult for Finn to tell whether a painting is actually finished.

Part of the uncertainty and whimsy of the paintings is that they are often inspired by the pure process of children's drawings. In an article about Finn, the arts journal *Denver Syntax* noted, "Adults typically struggle with illustrating the essences the way that a child does. ... Children typically work in the abstract — emphasizing the elements of importance to them, unabashedly and without restraint." Finn's work attempts to move back toward the unskilled, unforced rhythms of artmaking that come so easily to kids, the article continued.

In fact, the art of children also is displayed in the "Hallery" at the back of the gallery for the next few weeks, in conjunction with the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders. A number of children, teenagers and a few adults with autism spectrum disorders created works of art now displayed there. All are for sale. Funds raised from the artwork sold will be funneled directly back to the Thompson Center for efforts in research, care and treatment.

Some of the works are more abstract, some less; many make sweeping use of color and gesturing

illustrations. "Rain" by 9-year-old Blake Hinkel incorporates vibrant splattered paint akin to a Jackson Pollock painting. Paul Backes' pencilwork is extremely detailed and features local landmarks Jesse Hall and the Tiger Hotel. The art of Jordan Abiva, age 7, is positively bursting with menageries of animals and uninhibited exploration of the colors of the rainbow.

UNIONS AND REUNIONS

In addition to the variety of two- and three-dimensional art, the jewelry case is packed with new arrivals from Casey Sheppard, Jill Smith and Jette Vogt, who will have her jewelry trunk show on Dec. 4. One serendipitous coincidence, Perlow added, is that for PS:Gallery's very first show upon its founding, it displayed the work of Sager, Dahlquist and Finn together. The artistic reunion of the three was unplanned by either her or Sager.

"Really, my goal with every show is to have quality work and have a variety of styles and formats so that no matter what your personal preference, there's something you can appreciate," Perlow said. For the autumn exhibit, "I think we were able to achieve a really nice range of work and price points and styles."

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