

## ARTS &amp; THEATER

# Poetic visions abound in works by five artists

By Molly Glentzer  
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"Pavo No. 12" by Darren Waterston Photo: Inman Gallery

Mysteries and a sense of obsession hover in works by five artists who are drawing viewers into thoughtful realms right now at Houston galleries. Their inquiries lead down different paths, all stimulating.

Carl Palazzolo's elegiac "Recent and Remembered Work" feels simultaneously loaded and spare. In the main room at Texas Gallery hang four large paintings, each composed of multiple panels of small canvases with a virtuosic blend of oil, acrylic, pencil, crayon and subtle paper collage. Individually intriguing, the panels merge into epic works that brim with emotional questioning.

Just enough imagery rhythmically bridges some of the panels: A light bulb dangles vertically from a rope; a yardstick brings the eyes horizontal. Much of the work is layered beautifully with Palazzolo's familiar layers of circular squiggles that sometimes bring to mind coffee stain rings, drifting flower petals and floating numbers over a luscious, gentle fog of blended pastel colors.

Each work is awash in gestures that reference particulars of time and memory in the artist's personal narrative. The central canvas of the silvery "Solange," for example, came from the studio of the late Stephen Mueller. Palazzolo pays homage by layering on an egg (a Mueller signature) in his own gorgeous

3901 MAIN STREET HOUSTON, TEXAS 77002 PHONE: 713.526.7800 FAX: 713.526.7803 INFO@INMANGALLERY.COM

ombre style alongside a glowing yellow orb. You could read "Solange" as an altarpiece. Or just let it speak to your own history as it will.

"Pavo," Darren Waterston's show at Inman Gallery, grew out of "Filthy Lucre," his recent full-scale reimagining of James McNeill Whistler's 19th-century "Peacock Room" at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams. He seems to be trying to bring order to the opulence with 36 mixed-media paintings (mostly watercolor but with gouache and acrylic touches): Each is 14 by 11 inches, within an 18-by-15-inch frame.

Within that strict framework a multitude of fever dreams seems to be forming, morphing and evaporating into colorful vapors. Spiritual business is happening there; it's like you're witnessing the fitful creation of the universe.

While the shows at Texas and Inman look painstakingly hung, Eric Zimmerman's "Elegy for Left Hand Alone" at Art Palace Gallery wonderfully disrupts a boxy space with a diagonal wall. You might be walking into a natural science museum's laboratory full of marginally related artifacts.

Zimmerman's installation combines impeccably rendered drawings of graphite or ink with haunting undersea sounds and two large sculptures. The papier-mâché of "The Ghost of Joseph Beuys (The End of the Twenty-First Century)" convincingly evokes broken slabs of basalt. He also created a zine for the show, but they were all gone by the time I got there.

The drawings depict some things that might be real (a meteorite specimen, a saber-tooth tiger skeleton, an albino crocodile, a feather) and some things that are clearly imaged (a faux National Geographic cover and a poster for a screening of Hal Jepsen's 1970 surfer film "The Cosmic Children."

The black-and-white crispness of it creates a cool sense of restraint but also gives the show poetic quietude.

Next door at both Devin Borden and David Shelton Galleries, intense primary colors prevail, but they're held taut by geometry.

The "wristband quilts" of Christopher Cascio's "Current Obsessions II" at Borden fastidiously utilize relics of pop culture - wristbands from concerts, art fairs and so on - as if they're strips of fabric on a bedcover your great-grandmother might have sewn. Cascio describes himself as a "functional hoarder," and he shows more evidence of it in the show's second room, where meticulous paintings containing hundreds of different gun models over camouflage-inspired fields of color are mounted along with other objects on top of "quilts" of padded envelopes saved for many years.

Jonathan Ryan Storm's "The Mortimer Trap" at Shelton features six large paintings that were conceived as a compositional challenge. He applied colors by chance, from one end of a painting to the other, laying "traps" for himself that had to be solved along the way.

He's both solved the puzzles and found balance in the bright interplay. Something about the colors - or maybe the compositions - also gives them a kind of noisy tension. They're a cool wake-up.