

Arts & Reviews

GALLERIES



In "Recessional" (left) and "Preparations at Dusk," Matt Brickett's dreamlike images invite viewers to project their own stories onto the scene.

Two takes on the art of the story

Rich narratives mark the works of Matt Brackett, Jerry Williams

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

It's rare, in contemporary painting and sculpture, to find storytelling for its own sake. Narrative often plays second fiddle to technique or theory, but it's stories that drive two exhibitions up now: Matt Brackett's paintings at Alpha Gallery and Jerry Williams's sculptures at Genovese/Sullivan Gallery. Both are irresistibly accessible; neither forsakes form and technique for a well-told tale.

Brackett sets his deliciously ambiguous narratives at his late grandmother's home in Duxbury, which his family sold last year. He peoples the canvases with his own family and friends and, in one case, himself. The setting is rich with memory and loss, the relationships suggestive of longtime connection and entanglement. But he's not offering stories from his life. The images are too dreamlike; they verge on surreal. You could spend an hour looking at one, projecting your own story onto the scene.

"Recessional" has us gazing at the upper story of the wood-shingle house. People lean from every

window, their bodies angling outward as they look down. A man stands on the roof; his white hat and yellow shirt pick up the sun and turn him into a beacon. He, too, stares at the ground. Has a child fallen? Or did Dad, at the grill, call up for hamburger orders? It's impossible to say. As a painter, Brackett intensifies his tale with composition and tone. This work is all angles: The skewed position he places the viewer in with regard to the house makes a sharp counterpoint to the lines of the figures.

He uses light, dark, and their meeting place at twilight to great effect. In paintings such as "The Perseids," which features a woman gazing out the window of a sleeping porch, and "Preparations at Dusk," in which two figures hoist a pallet piled with crates up into a tree, Brackett casts the glowing white of the house's lights against the electric blue that fills the sky just after the sun sets. He milks the magic and portent of that moment, which is neither night nor day, a time when unpredictable things can happen. In Brackett's paintings, they do.



In his diorama "Tattooed Venus," Jerry Williams creates a complicated and active space within the confines of a box.

Thinking inside a box

Jerry Williams's vivid sculptural dioramas mingle a cheesy, B-movie sensibility with art history references and provocative story lines. In "Tattooed Venus," a clever riff on Velazquez's "Venus at Her Mirror," Williams positions a middle-age fellow before his bathroom mirror with a towel around his waist. The mirror is a diorama within the diorama; its reflection reveals the protagonist's inner life. In it, the cherub from the Velazquez work wraps a pink scarf around our fallible hero's neck.

The reflection is sweetly ro-

mantic, compared to the quotidian life in the bathroom, and if you look carefully, you'll see a woman behind the misted-up shower door. There in the flesh, she is not part of her partner's dreams.

Williams has a remarkable ability to create a complicated and active space within the confines of a box; he uses saturated colors and vividly drawn characters to make his intricate architecture come to life. Making an animated film seems like a natural next step, but "The Twist," his little eight-minute takeoff on film noir, never takes off; the narrative is too symmetri-

Matt Brackett: New Paintings

At: Alpha Gallery, through March 1.
617-536-4465, www.alphagallery.com

Jerry Williams: An American and

Jay Swift: American Buddhas

At: Genovese/Sullivan Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave., through Feb. 28.
617-426-9738
www.genovesesullivan.com

Xylor Jane: Recent Drawings

At: osp gallery, 450 Harrison Ave., through Feb. 25. 617-778-5265,
www.ospgallery.com

cally simple; the moral at the end feels pat. He's better off capturing a moment in a diorama and leaving his viewer to imagine the tale.

Jay Swift's sculptures, also at Genovese/Sullivan, have nothing in common with Williams's boxes; the pairing jars. But Swift puts his audience at ease with his quiet, elegant works. Two are abstract versions of the Buddha. They face each other, one in an orangy bronze, the other in silver, rounded and serene. The silver one subtly gets shinier at the top, suggesting enlightenment.

Swift also offers black slate wall sculptures, each a simple gesture with a wry, surprising cartoon appeal. "Kiss," for instance, is an oval that cinches inward on one side in

an exaggerated pucker. All of this artist's works are minimalist and strictly formal, but they don't swagger with minimalism's austerity. They have a lot of heart.

Precision

Xylor Jane, who has drawings up at osp gallery, structures her work around mathematics, using the Fibonacci sequence or prime numbers to create grid-based patterns. She usually draws by hand in brightly colored ink. The hand drawing — especially two pieces made with her left hand — puts a sheepish, aw-shucks twist on imagery that pulses and glimmers like Op Art.

Ironically, Jane, who has been developing an international following, is too calculated. She conflates two hot trends of the moment: faux naive work and obsessive mark-making — both of which fit handily into osp's aesthetic. Separately, each style has its own power. A larger pattern erupts out of the obsessive drawing. The faux-naive painting often considers the construction of space and reiterates the artist's own peculiar authorship.

Brought together in this way, however, the two styles work against each other, and the result is cloying and demanding, like a small child who has gone too long without a nap.