

First Friday for sale

BY JOHN EWING

It was a run on art, or as close to it as this town has seen on a First Friday. A big show, 21 paintings, and half way to selling out by the end of the week. If Kimberly Squaglia expressed paroxysms of Sally Field proportion ("You like me! You *really* like me!"), the opening of *Vacilliform*, her master's thesis exhibition at UTSA Satellite Space, justified the enthusiasm. New graduate or not, the crowd could spot a painter's painter of exceptional skill, and whipped out their credit cards. That's how artists buy art, and Squaglia's lickably-slick canvases were snatched up by her peers, among others. As DJ Jester spun vinyl, two local gallery owners were close to a catfight over *Verdant*, one of Squaglia's brightly colored oil paintings of chrysanthemum-like designs layered with clear resin finishes. Other paintings reference the show's title more closely with high-contrast abstractions of the microscopic world. Against stormy backgrounds, Squaglia's tangled forms make fascinating images from the stuff below our fingernails. If only petri dishes looked this chic.

At the other end of Blue Star Arts Complex, Lily Hanson packed Cactus Bra Space with plump, soft sculpture. Made with stuffed, wire armatures covered in sheer fabric, the curious forms sit on the floor or hang from the wall on black straps. Some of these are grouped in thought-provoking pairs, but one-too-many quasi-humanoid plushies stress how quickly fetishized, body-part art is growing stale.

Much more bracing are drawings by Constance Lowe and Callida Borgnino in a fine, two-artist show at Sala Diaz. Lowe's precisely handled pencils bleed in Technicolor across the plastic surface of her small drawings. These rarified doodles suggest Rorschach inkblots, but are so finely shaded they have the evanescent texture of sunsets and fire. Borgnino's work is a fitting counterpoint, arrayed in myriad small frames across a gallery wall. These ink-on-paper drawings obsessively repeat the lines and curves of a vaguely recognizable shape, something like a cow's pelvis. With repetition, the shape mutates into elaborate designs.

The prettiest repetitions are at the Wild Horse Gallery on South Alamo Street. Carol Brown's relief prints are created in the *Ukiyo* style, a painstaking process involving carved wooden blocks and "inks" made from watercolors and rice paste. The Japanese term means "picture of the floating world," and Brown's studies from nature emphasize this quality. *River Rocks, Wet* and *River Rocks, Dry* are the best examples. The image of water rippling over a bed of round stones is a subtle choice for this simple printing method and hovers delicately amid nature's abstractions. ■

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