

Galleries

Evocations of tea and sympathy with nature

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Sip a cup of tea, and you take refuge from the world. More than any other food or drink, the preparation and consumption of tea is an opportunity for rest and reflection, a return to the self. Perhaps that's why ritual has developed around it: During afternoon tea in Britain, or a Japanese tea ceremony, everything else stops.

Ceramist Judith Motzkin considers the elemental nature of tea in her show at Gallery 57. "The leaves are added to the water, heated by fire, mixed in a clay vessel," she points out in her artist's statement. The small teapots in her "Tea Series," then, become stand-ins for the self, brought together in this alchemy of elements into something greater than the sum of the parts. They brew, they steep, they nourish, and they empty in a series of assemblages in boxes that hang on the gallery walls.

This is a turn for Motzkin, whose more familiar raku vases and carved pillars in pale, smoky tones are also on view. Each of the tea assemblages has the look of a container of sacred objects gathered together for use in a ritual.

A John Muir quote accompanies "Going In/Going Out": "I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay until sundown. For going out, I discovered, was actually going in." Tree bark juts into the box from its frame, creating a cozy interior. The pot inside reads like a square-shaped human profile, with a Dumbo nose (for a spout and round, grinning cheeks). Branches rise behind it, creating a thicket in which cups nest. In her work with clay, and now with tea, Motzkin celebrates the earth and the peace we can find in nature, if only we take the time to connect to it.

In his show at the Yezerski Gallery, Morgan Bulkeley addresses na-



In Morgan Bulkeley's relief "New Tree II," eyes float in the sky, pencils are tangled in the leaves, and branches skewer sketches.

ture as well, but with a mournful and cynical eye to the strangulating distance we have created between ourselves and the earth. His comical paintings and reliefs have turned from cityscapes to rolling hills since he moved to the Berkshires a few years ago. The paintings' grounds are asquiggle as poodle's fur, with elegant birds and inelegant humans popping through in tongue-in-cheek tableaux.

"Ten Birds, Three Mistakes" has jays, sparrows, and loons casually going about their business as three cartoonish humans, nude and bumbling, try to bring their tiny sense of order to a world too big for them to comprehend. One takes a whole apple proffered by a snake and goes at it with an electric mixer, holding a can of applesauce in his other hand. Another wrestles a television set away from an alligator, and the third basks in the sun under an umbrella, juggling bottles of Coppertone.

Bulkeley's reliefs look like paintings from a distance; in fact, they are intricately carved wood panels, shapes, and figures swelling slightly from the flat ground. Each is a mask, with eyes and mouth carved out. In some, the eyes are so small and far apart, the mouth so low, you almost lose the figure in the imagery, as if the dream is bigger than the dreamer. In "New Tree II," the eyes float hollow in a blue sky. Between them, the trunk of a slender birch tree drops. Black birds roost in the tree. But man's hand is not far

away: Pencils the size of the branches tangle amid the leaves. The branches skewer small pencil sketches. Artist equates with Creator here, suggesting that not all we humans have wrought is ruinous.

James Tellin's minimalist plywood constructions, also at Yezerski, jut off the wall like shields, coated in washes of acrylic paint that caress and accentuate the fluid grain of the wood. Tellin's attention to color, texture, and pure line make him an unabashed formalist who builds self-consciously beautiful objects, but he has another agenda, as well: He's out to trick our eyes.

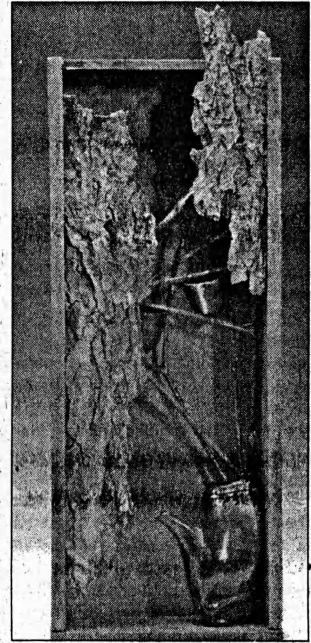
"Wood Construction No. 81," pulsing with hot salmon and red tones, projects out to a vertical crease down the center. But angles cut into the wood along the bottom and spare shadows the artist creates on the surface with paint hint that the piece is pleated like a screen. It's unlike a minimalist to present something so formally straightforward, and then pull the rug out from under us. These aren't merely beautiful; they're sneaky, too.

Ric Haynes is an expressive art therapist, and his deeply psychological bent cries out in his paintings, now up at the Creiger-Dane Gallery. These dreamscapes populated with monsters, snakes, and distorted humans read like feverish ruminations. They're claustrophobic: Bristling, expressionistic brush strokes in saturated colors rush over canvases

JUDITH E. MOTZKIN: NEW WORKS-NEW MEDIAE
At: Cambridge Arts Council's Gallery 57, 57 Inman St., Cambridge, through Oct. 29

MORGAN BULKELEY and JAMES TELLIN
At: Howard Yezerski Gallery, 11 Newbury St., through Oct. 28

RIC HAYNES: RECENT PAINTINGS
At: Creiger-Dane Gallery, 36 Newbury St., through Nov. 1



Judith Motzkin's work at Gallery 57 considers the elemental nature of tea.

crammed with mythic images.

There's a raw power to these surrealist paintings, but often they are so crowded with shapes and figures and a landscape that seems threateningly alive that it's hard to keep track of what's going on. Haynes's best pieces have a little breathing space and a hierarchy of images. "Stepping Off" shows a masked woman, clasping a rose and a sack tied to a stick, boldly stepping off a jagged cliffs edge into a neon-green sky. A hovering sun with sad eyes and pursed lips looks on. It's an archetypal image, similar to the card representing the fool (and the freshness of an open, beginner's mind) in many Tarot decks.

Haynes lets his images boil up and multiply on canvas - what any artist must do, without censorship. Ultimately, though, to make fine art, the editing mind must intervene. In a piece like "Stepping Off," the editor is at work. The artist would benefit from inviting the editor in more often.