

Museums

In the galleries: Dickson Carroll puts fun and folly in form and function

By Mark Jenkins

June 21

At first glance, Dickson Carroll's creations don't appear especially functional. Made of wood and stained with bright shades of tinted varnish, the D.C. artist's pieces suggest children's book backdrops made three-dimensional. Yet Carroll trained as an architect — at Yale, a temple of modernist design — and divides his time between making buildings and art. His Addison/Ripley Fine Art show is titled "Recent Sculpture," but also includes renderings of architectural work, whether actually built or merely dreamed.

Many of Carroll's designs are for residential interiors or additions, but he's better known for whimsical public projects. These include benches, gazebos and pergolas that sport candy colors and cartoonish bulges. Models of some of these follies are included in the show alongside photos of completed designs such as a weather vane for a Silver Spring school.

The artist's smaller structures are placed in parks, playgrounds and leafy suburban neighborhoods. He also has an affinity for rural areas, such as West Virginia's eastern panhandle, whose geography inspired several of these pieces. Nestled inside an egg-shaped frame, "In the Gorge" is a 3-D vignette of a canoeist on the Cacapon River, site of an unusual tectonic phenomenon.

Carroll's designs might seem out of place amid glass-walled skyscrapers, but the artist is at home in historical cities. One of the show's highlights is "Au Claire de la Lune," a large model of a Paris that's distilled into a few of its most loved buildings; they're clumped tightly together under a jeweled moon and birdlike clouds, and overlooking a nearly vertical Seine meant to simulate the downward view from a bridge. The sculpture is both an homage and a reverie.

Not all of Carroll's visions rely on a strong sense of place. The show also features abstract pieces, notably three renditions of "Voyage to Cytheria." The title refers to an allegorical Antoine Watteau painting, but Carroll's versions portray a mood rather a scene. Like all his works, these vividly hued machine-like constructions convey motion, exuberance and a sense of play.

Dickson Carroll: Recent Sculpture Through July 11 at Addison/Ripley Fine Art, 1670 Wisconsin Ave. NW.

Pietro Ruffo

Italy is a north star beckoning to people fleeing Africa and the Middle East, undertaking an exodus whose perils have touched the nation's artists. Pietro Ruffo's "Constellations/Migration" is the second recent IA&A at Hillyer

exhibition in which an Italian artist incorporates one of the reflective blankets used to swaddle immigrants who survive the crossing. The shiny coverings are symbols of both distress and welcome.

Like its predecessor, Andrea Limauro's "Mare Nostrum," Ruffo's show joins classical heritage and contemporary issues. The Rome-based artist constructs large-scale 3-D collages that include antique maps and cutout illustrations of the creatures whose myths endure in the names of constellations. The collages conjure the lands and seas that Ulysses and Aeneas supposedly traversed millennia before today's nomads.

Ruffo uses the emergency blanket as the medium for sketches of scenes from the European Colonial era. Other drawings are combined into the shapes of Africa and the Americas, the "new worlds" Italy and its neighbors once claimed as theirs. Europe's kinship with the other continents, Ruffo illustrates, is not just the stuff of breaking news. The relationship is as venerable as heroic quests for new homes.

Pietro Ruffo: Constellations/Migration Through June 30 at IA&A at Hillyer, 9 Hillyer Ct. NW.

Bethesda Painting Awards

The artists selected for the 15th annual "Bethesda Painting Awards" — eight out of nearly 300 applicants — appear to divide evenly between abstractionists and representationalists. But most of the latter are influenced by abstraction, and one of the former inserts historical imagery into minimalist color fields.

That artist is McKinley Wallace, whose double-edged pictures incorporate bits of prints and photographs. The Baltimore artist's "KLAN" includes part of a photo of the 1928 Ku Klux Klan march through downtown Washington, but all that's visible are the Capitol dome and the tips of a few pointed white hoods. Above the clipped vignette are just blocks of streaky gray and cool blue.

There's a similar color scheme, but a rather different vibe, to Lillian Bayley Hoover's small landscapes. The Baltimore painter slyly frames open sky with small aspects of the scene, whether the notch in a rock shoreline or silhouetted wires and cables. The resulting views seem both expansive and disconcertingly confined.

Black sky and a stark horizon line set off the back of a woman's head in "Look Right," the largest and most striking of four paintings by Baltimore's Gina Gwen Palacios. The compositions are much busier in two realist pictures of women and children at a birthday party, made by Williamsburg's Nicole Santiago. Her paintings' funkiness contrasts the sense of order in W.C. Richardson's compositions, in which rectangular black shapes are surrounded by warm-colored halos. The University Park artist's canvases can be seen as landscapes of a sort, depicting the expanses of a clockwork cosmos.

Bethesda Painting Awards Through June 29 at Gallery B, 7700 Wisconsin Ave., Bethesda.

Play, Protection or Peril

Ray guns, model soldiers and stuffed animals are among the ominous playthings in the first of three gun-themed shows at H-Space. The "play" installment of "Play, Protection or Peril" includes Christopher Malone's mosaic-

