

Rail Park activist's art is one of best shows to see in Philly galleries this month

by Edith Newhall, Updated: April 25, 2019



LOCKS GALLERY

Rail Park activist and cofounder Sarah McEaney continues to draw on her everyday life for the paintings in her “Callowhill” show at Locks Gallery, named after the artist’s longtime neighborhood. What’s different here is that McEaney is offering a longer, broader view than ever.

The studio and living areas in her house appear wider and deeper — and are observed from more intentionally eccentric perspectives. The city of Philadelphia is displayed more panoramically, as viewed from a tall building.

Details in her paintings, always small, have become infinitesimal.

McEneaney sometimes paints herself into the scene, but in these works she's scarcely visible — even less so than in her last show at Locks, in 2016 — and when she does appear, she's at work, usually shown from a distance. Even the artist's cats and dogs, previously subjects of affectionate and uncanny portraits, are writ small.

The common denominator of this new work is its expansiveness, as in *Rail Park Winter*, depicting a bundled-up McEneaney on skis at the Rail Park with her dog, as seen from a building's high floor. A snow-covered Philadelphia spreads out for miles in front of her. It's a scene that recalls Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Hunters in the Snow*, with its sharp contrasts of light and perspectives, and minuscule figures.

The same expansion can be seen and felt in McEneaney's modest, optimistic springtime portrayal of her rooftop garden, *New Yard*, with a cat sprawling comfortably in the foreground and a watchful dog at the back. The tops of factory buildings peek above a wall, affirming the privacy of this urban oasis in a former industrial section of the city.

I was disappointed not to see closeups of the dog and cats, which McEneaney does so well. Maybe next time.

Through May 11 at Locks Gallery, 600 Washington Square South, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. 215-629-1000 or locksgallery.com.

From whale to waves



CLAIRE ILTIS

Tristin Lowe's "Blue Winged Double-Nose Squid Spirit" (2019), glass, at Fleisher/Ollman

Anyone who saw Tristin Lowe's 2009 work, *Mocha Dick* — a 52-foot-long wool-felt version of the whale that inspired Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* — can attest to Lowe's inventiveness and acute sense of the absurd. His current show at Fleisher/Ollman, "Tiny Bangs," features smaller but no less arresting works, realized in a variety of materials.

Lowe's works explore phenomena that release energy in smaller doses than the Big Bang, hence the title.



The showstopper is *Big Blue Wave*, a neon-filled, glass-tubing sculpture of a wave form, emitting an eerie blue glow and taking up much of the gallery's back wall.

It gets stiff competition from sculptures fashioned from recycled jeans, including *Chromosapiens*, a looming double-helix toughened with epoxy resin and paint, and *Happy Pants*, a motorized pair of jeans that unexpectedly breaks into a dance.

In preparation for “Emanation,” an exhibition now at WheatonArts in Millville, N.J. (through Dec. 31), Lowe designed objects that were then realized in glass by Wheaton’s glass artists. A number of those pieces are here, as well, and they’re as strange and fanciful as anything Lowe has put his mind to.

Through June 1 at Fleisher/Ollman, 1216 Arch St., 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays. 215-545-6140 or fleisherollman.com.

Visceral images from nature



EDITH NEWHALL

Joan Wadleigh Curran's print collage, "Construction III" (2018), etching, woodcut, collage, at C. R. Ettinger Studio Gallery

Nature — and human beings’ environmental assaults on it — has long been the subjects of Joan Wadleigh Curran’s paintings, well before climate change and global warming became the animating issues of our times.

Her recent paintings, at InLiquid Gallery, are partially based on news photographs of real disasters, such as hurricanes and subsequent flooding in the American South and wildfires in California. Painted in Wadleigh Curran’s expressionistic style, these visceral images warn that everywhere is at peril.

I was not familiar with her prints until now. Collages made from her prior works, on a variety of papers, are on exhibit at C. R. Ettinger Studio and Gallery. These sublime images of common city flora — what many consider weeds — argue for a natural landscape composed entirely of them.

Through May 9 at InLiquid Gallery, 1400 N. American St., noon to 6 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays. 215-235-3405 or inliquid.org/exhibitions/instability

Through May 17 at C. R. Ettinger Studio and Gallery, 2215 South St., noon to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays (calling ahead is advised). 610-585-4084 or crettinger.com.



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Edith Newhall



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