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8th Anniversary Issue

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March/April 2014

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RENEWAL

MOTHER BROOK ARTS FLIRTS WITH A NEW DIRECTION

Planted squarely on one of the oft-neglected borders between suburban and urban Boston, the former mill village of East Dedham has long remained an untapped opportunity for thoughtful redevelopment. Along the banks of the Mother Brook Canal, the oldest hand-dug mill pond in the United States (circa 1639), and former home to Dedham Pottery, the factory that produced the collectible, crackle-glazed ceramics from 1896-1943, the neighborhood had the bones for an artistic rebirth. In 2011, a group of civic-minded residents and local selectmen saw the soon to be de-commissioned Avery School as the perfect opportunity.

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

“Why do we automatically think the building needs to be torn down because the use changes?” was the question posed by Town of Dedham Selectman Paul Reynolds, who helped spearhead the re-use committee and now serves as a member of the Mother Brook Arts Advisory Board. The committee moved fast through a series of public meetings, resulting in overwhelming local support for the project. The doors of the Avery School, officially closed as surplus in April 2012, were re-opened in June 2013 as Mother Brook Arts and Community Center (MBACC).

Occupancy of the MBACC, which includes non-residential artist studios, classrooms and community space, has been slowly rolling out since last summer. The four-level brick building now provides studio space for 36 artists, musicians and educators, and includes Metalmorphosis jewelry studio, itself a re-birth of the former DeCordova metals studio, which was bought out last year by a group of jewelry artists who had been working together there for 25 years. A variety of creative classes spanning visual, performing and healing arts are open for youth and adult enrollment.

With the core community finally in place, MBACC executive director Jean Ford Webb invited painter and MBACC art instructor Martha Wakefield to curate a group show to inaugurate the center’s exhibition program, with a goal of



Elizabeth Kostojohn, *Are You Still There? #1*, 2012, graphite on mylar, 19" x 24".

enticing visitation and participation. With curatorial assistance from mixed-media artist Jeanne Williamson, the result is “Flirt,” a seven-week show that opened on February 1 and runs through March 21, featuring variations on the theme by 14 regional artists working across a variety of media. The exhibit roster includes MBACC resident-artists Patty Chang, David Kelley, Danielle LaPointe and Iris Sonnenschein, plus Boston-metro-area artists Williamson, Merrill Comeau, Christiane Corcelle, Virginia Fitzgerald, Elizabeth Kostojohn, Judith Monteferrante, Robin Reynolds, Michael Seif, Martha Wakefield and Wendy Young.

“The goal of Flirt is to create an intoxicating visual feast that courts the Dedham community to embark on an enduring relationship with art and this new center,” Williamson said.

Wakefield explains that what started originally as an attempt “to do something small” expanded into a more ambitious curatorial project; interpretations of the theme

MOTHER BROOK ARTS AND COMMUNITY CENTER
123 HIGH STREET
DEDHAM, MASSACHUSETTS
THROUGH MARCH 21



Top: Judith Monteferrante, *Water Shock*, photography metal print, 20" x 30".
Bottom: Merrill Comeau, *Mazie's Bodice Ripper*, mixed-media, 8" x 4".
(Photo by Susan Byrne).

include "everything from lace, the sensual ... to the understated."

The 64 works that make up "Flirt" appear along the institutional hallways of the center's first and second floors, with additional sculptural installations in the flanking stairwells by resident artist Danielle LaPointe and Natick-based artist Virginia Fitzgerald. Like couples at a formal dinner party, works by the exhibiting artists are divided up and paired with novel partners along the long, white walls – encouraging a leisurely exploration of the building and freeform interpretations of the exhibit's theme.

Wendy Young's "Love Notes No. 1 - No. 16," a grid of 6" x 6" acrylic paintings on panel, seem most at home in the unavoidably nostalgic setting

of the school hallway. Young layers fragments of language extracted from her personal collection of handwritten notes and letters with markings evocative of notebook doodles. Crossed-out words and random declarations like "to be me. - let me know" convey a convincingly juvenile, journalistic scrapbook of self-analysis and, ultimately, personal redemption.

A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

Elizabeth Kostojohn's series of graphite drawings on Mylar entitled "Are you still there?" depict a struggle to communicate between "two life partners – yet, two separate people," explains the artist. Each drawing in the series of five reveals a portrait of either the artist or her husband making the all-too-familiar gestures of taking a call or viewing a text message on a handheld mobile device. In these drawings, Kostojohn leaves the active hand un-rendered, empty of flesh, muscle, technology and power. The monochromatic, meticulously rendered drawings pop out as a thought-provoking anomaly among the more exuberant splashes of color along the hallways.

The boldest colors in "Flirt" belong to gestural floral paintings by Robin Reynolds and large photographs of blooms submerged in water by Judith Monteferrante.

Clothing, or the lack thereof, is explored through various lenses

by several of the artists in "Flirt," including selections from curator Wakefield's own series of paintings that depict a woman's slip flickering through fields of color that obscure and reveal at once.

In Merrill Comeau's "Mazie's Bodice Ripper," a wall-mounted installation of de-constructed, repurposed clothing, plastic net vegetable bags, paint and thread; battered, fuchsia blooms trail from the flattened carcass of what appears to be an old-fashioned woman's undergarment. Comeau creates elaborate, mixed-media murals from discarded materials with a focus on textiles and textile techniques. Silky, pale threads dangle like vines from raw selvage, concealing the memory of an invisible body. The work is nostalgic – and oddly synesthetic. The visual language suggests a spray of perfume, the pheromonal marker of a long-absent woman.

"Flirt" co-curator Jeannie Williamson uses the grid pattern from temporary plastic construction fences as an abstract construct and as a stand-in for other objects like lace, windows and clothing. In "(Fence) Shirts and (Hot) Flashes #1," from the artist's first autobiographical series, Williamson's monoprinted grid wraps around a panel roughly the proportions of a shirtfront. The grid folds over itself at the top edge of the panel to reveal a blushing triangle of



décolleté, referencing the sensation a woman feels when experiencing a hot flash.

Photographer Michael Seif's work negates clothing altogether. Seif arranges group photo shoots at granite quarries, primarily in Maine and Gloucester, organizing local residents via word-of-mouth to gather, doff their clothes en masse and merge with the mineral-infused waters like flickering schools of fish. The resulting prints are painterly, bordering on abstract.

Turnout at "Flirt's" opening reception on February 7 was strong, with visitors filing down the long hallways to mingle with the exhibiting artists and peek curiously into studios featuring lovely original woodwork details, including framed chalkboards left as markers of the former school.

"It was so affirming to have such a phenomenal turnout. The commu-



nity has really embraced the new art center," said Webb.

Future plans for the center include construction of a sculpture garden, a digital media studio, a retail store and

a café in hopes of increasing visitation, revenue opportunities and overall participation in the community.

Michael Seif, *Flame In Water*, archival pigment print, 29" x 36".

Meredith Cutler

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April 4 Opening Reception
5:30-9pm