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Ag Works collective show displays power of a few good pieces

By Kurt Shaw, PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
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Photos

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'Zelienople Lion'
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'The Awakening'
Submitted

'Interstitial'

What: Recent photographs by members of Ag Works

When: Through Aug. 1 at noon-7 p.m. Mondays to Thursdays, noon-6 p.m. Fridays. Also on display in conjunction with film screenings at Melwood screening room.

Admission: Free

Where: Pittsburgh Filmmakers Galleries, 477 Melwood Ave., Oakland

Details: 412-681-5449

About the writer

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With so many large group exhibits on display throughout the region, it is refreshing to find a presentation such as "Interstitial," a much smaller group effort by Ag Works currently on view at Pittsburgh Filmmakers in Oakland.

Ag Works is an artist collective involving 10 emerging artist/photographers in Pittsburgh whose focus is helping members create and share work with each other. They started as a group of Filmmakers photography alumni, but now also include artists working in a variety of media.

Thus, as this exhibit demonstrates, each artist has his own unique vision, yet the works, like the group itself, come together as a collective whole. For example, many of the works address issues related to memory, as in Missy Jarzenske's black-and-white photographs of rubble and remnants of buildings that used to exist throughout the region, forcing the viewer to remember how they once existed.

Less direct, Bryan Conley's work explores how memories are manipulated in the brain, which warps, blends and often loses information. His photos represent this phenomenon in their use of lines, shadows, blurred faces, almost -unrecognizable forms, ambiguous shapes and shadows. "Off the Path," a black and white photograph, is a blurred vision of a wooded grove, soft and steeped in shadow, as if the manifestation of memory itself.

Mandy Kendall's candy-coated visions of odd and remarkable real-world cartoon creatures address what she calls our "collective childhood." Many are the kind found at carnivals and theme parks, such as the jack-in-the-box and the shoe of old-lady-who-lived-in-a-shoe of Story Book Forest fame. But some, like "Giant Chicken" and "Zelienople Lion" were found off the beaten path. The former was found outside a carwash in Hopwood and latter is a lion-shaped water fountain located in the town square of Zelienople.

By photographing these images and printing them in a tricolor gum bichromate process, she produces dreamy, colorful images that are as indelible as memories themselves.

Magali Duzant also focuses on nostalgia, but in her case it is a nostalgia that is not the artist's own. Our memory is often superseded by the images others have put before us, "especially in film," she says. She refers to this process as "appropriation of memory." Thus, her photos often pose people, even animals, as if they were in movies, and there is a moody and purposeful placement of the objects that surround them. "Deer," for example, captures a dead deer in a stream, appearing in dramatic fashion, as if part of a devastating scene.

Nostalgia, too, is the focus of Matt Robison's lens. His untitled photographs depict the contrast between rustic and industrial symbols, while accentuating the shapes of everyday objects. "Untitled, Pancake breakfast," for example, seems simple in theory, but is complex in composition, including an interplay of shadows that is delightful.

Opposite Robison's photos are the works of Julia Bodura, whose overtly personal pieces are about transformation. Seen together as an installation, they are collectively titled "Photosynthesis: Seeing the Light." Largely consisting of pictures of herself superimposed on autumn leaves, they are a personal portrayal of photo synthesis that ranges in theme from "the roots," "the dream," "the conflict" and "the epiphany" to "the awakening." Each grows more personal as the series progresses and each shows a subsequent stage in the transformation of the artist, who describe the work as a chronicle of "my growth as an individual as I struggle to adjust and prepare for radical changes in my life."

Like Bodura's series, Laura Jean Kahl's series, "The Onerous Nature of Oneself," is deeply personal, showing the artist's process of trying to discover how she is perceived by other people.

Each picture shows Kahl in various stages of revelation, at first clothed and wearing a mask that was originally intended to be a self-portrait, but proved to be unrecognizable to viewers. In subsequent photos, she undresses and



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removes the mask. At the end she is in her basement, naked, cutting her hair, and thus greatly altering her physical identity.

Given such variety of approaches, it's easy to see that big ideas can come in little packages and small groups can collectively come up with compelling exhibits. If you are interested in photography as a means of personal expression, this small-but-tidy group exhibit is definitely worth seeking out.

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