

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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DETROITARTS

SO BEAUTIFUL: Leopold Foulem, Thomas Rapai, Albert G. Richards, Sarah Wagner
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Revolution, Ferndale, Michigan
16 April - 28 May 2005

There is a certain familiarity to the collection. A likeliness to a grandmother's relics but with a fuzzy remembrance. The ornate and sometimes decorated personal items have a new take on the past. "It is a lot about memory," reveals Revolution Gallery's assistant director. From the super sized birds, ceramic dishes, ruffled drapery, and floral prints, SO BEAUTIFUL is a thought provoking group exhibition.

Although the items are not grandmother's old collectables, the works of art blend together an art viewing that allows for a dissection as a whole as well as singly. Some pieces stand on their own while others set the background to the scene. The show is essentially about evoking the feeling of the object.



Lightly draped fabric pools into leaves and soft puddles of sculpted cloth. Sarah Wagner (Oakland, CA) arranges the pieces to fall from the corner of a wall or mysteriously from the ceiling. White or black in color the simplicity is properly displayed against the bird background and florid bowls. The delicate nature of the ruffled leaves unfold to the floor and reveal the precision to which they were created. She is inspired by plants such as prairie coneflower and California poppy.

Immediately entering the gallery, the viewer is confronted with large oil paintings of birds. Yes, giant colorful birds. There is no avoiding the bold, somewhat strange subject matter of artist Thomas Rapai (Ann Arbor). His paintings remain fresh yet structured, colorful yet specific to a color palette, gestural yet refined, cartoon-like yet serious and playful yet menacing. The birds ask for more than a quick glance. The painterly strokes fill the center of the canvas leaving a white negative space around the subjects allowing a resting point for the eye. Some frolic about while others like a robin with an oversized "brain" have an attack- of- the- birds- movie feel. With the delicate ceramic and

soft sculpture the paintings stand out as key pieces of an Audubon-like collection. Maybe paired with other pieces the paintings may take on a different life, but for now the birds are a nice reminder of spring.

Colorful ceramic bowls sit on shelves like fancy candy jars not to be touched. It is funny how in a gallery environment they are seen completely differently than if they were at home on the counter or in a china cabinet. They now have a preciousness to them that may not have existed otherwise. Within the context of the show they contribute to the decorative, delicate theme but as for on their own they might be lost in the spaciousness of the gallery. The artist Leopold Foulem (Montreal) brings to mind museum display, 18th century Chinese ceramics and engages in abstraction and memory filled narratives.

Along the back wall (not pictured) is a line of black and white prints that are made using a technique called radiography. Albert G. Richard teaches radiography at the University of Michigan School of Dentistry. The detailed value studies are of curving flowers and organic pieces of plant and nature. It is an x-ray view into the meticulous shapes and values of nature. The prints mimic the ceramic bowls' decorative level, leaving less for thought and underlying intent than beauty.

SO BEAUTIFUL is the perfect spring show. The show was curated during one of Michigan's last terrible blizzards. The show came out as an "emotional need" for something light, fresh and memorable.

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