

# PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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Arts: Features

## Hidden Meanings

By Megan Voeller



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If the Tampa artist collective [5]art isn't on your radar, you're missing a key piece of the puzzle when it comes to local arts. The five-member group is quietly responsible for at least one exhibit per month -- and whether it's showcasing one of its own members or a gaggle of newly discovered artist friends, the quality of the work is always solid. This weekend, [5]art is set to make some noise during a multipurpose reception for three exhibits the group has had a hand in creating.

On Friday, *REDUCED*, a black-and-white show curated by artist and [5]art member Kurt Piazza, takes the stage in the hallways and public landings at the West Tampa Center for the Arts. (As always, many of the historic cigar factory's resident artists will open their private studio doors in conjunction with the show.) At the same time, [5]art member Tracy Midulla Reller pulls back the curtain on her solo show in the building's Gallery #209. And Julie Weitz's terrific solo show, *Hidden or Missing*, bows out with a closing reception in Gallery #211, the space [5]art calls its West Tampa outpost.

Weitz's show deserves special notice. As much as I'm looking forward to perusing *REDUCED*'s funky array of works under \$200 or seeing Midulla Reller's sublime silhouettes (more on both below), *Hidden or Missing* strikes me as terribly important in an of-the-moment but not too short-lived kind of way. Weitz's paintings aren't just pretty or amusing (though they offer plenty in those departments), they're highly thought-provoking in the manner that separates art from entertainment or decoration.

The weighty points of departure for her lovely-but-disturbing paintings are terror and cultural relativism. Hoods in various shapes and colors play a starring role as ambiguously charged symbols with both historic and contemporary resonances, from Abu Ghraib to the KKK. The paintings drive home the point that this neutral garment's menacing potency is the Yellow Peril of our time, symbolic of otherness and all its potentially sinister implications. That Weitz renders the hoods delicately and wittily in velvety gouache on paper only compounds the conundrum they present: Are they evil or absurd?

Weitz, who teaches art at USF, says growing up in a conservative Jewish family in Chicago gave her an early, firsthand experience of conflicting cultural and political histories.

As a college student, she learned that the Zionist leaders she was taught to revere as a child were regarded as villains by people sympathetic to the Palestinian cause; experience convinced her that neither black-and-white point of view was right.

In another series, she renders gently abstracted portraits of those same Zionist leaders, along with Confederate generals and Arab terrorists, in watery gray ink. Inside the gallery, the eerily similar portraits are arranged in a row along one wall. Viewers will see what they want in the paintings, as in life: fatherly figures of authority, heroes, villains, leaders who made grave errors of judgment, bastions of courage, cowards and so on. Literally, the men -- who all sport glowing white beards -- are indistinguishable from others of their type; I left certain that I had seen William James, Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche until Weitz gently corrected my impression.

While the USF prof's small gem of a show packs a big wallop, *REDUCED* promises a plethora of works conforming to the following restrictions: a color palette limited to black, white and gray; dimensions less than 5 feet by 5 feet; and prices at \$200 or less. The exhibit mimics the format of a popular black-and-white show curator Piazza staged at the Gulf Coast Museum of Art during his former tenure there. Here he's used a grapevine approach to pull in a diverse pool of local artists as well as artists from around the country. Look for works in a wide variety of media, including printmaking, painting, drawing, photography and video.

Midulla Reller, who teaches at HCC, is a deserving local favorite for her delicate paintings of women in silhouette with musical notes or a flock of birds fluttering inside and a related series of animal pairs joined by umbilical-cord-like connectors. Be sure to check out her latest work dealing with the same themes of connection and visual austerity.

In all, Friday promises a [5]art three-fer that's not to be missed.



enlarge

Courtesy Of The Artist  
BACK IN THE HOOD: Julie Weitz's "Cast(e) 1," from her *Hidden or Missing* show at West Tampa Center for the Arts.

### INFO

**Julie Weitz: Hidden or Missing**  
Runs through Dec. 15. Gallery #211.  
**Tracy Midulla Reller: Connectivity and Austerity**  
Runs Dec. 14-Dec. 28. Gallery #209.  
**REDUCED**  
Runs Dec. 14-Dec. 28.  
Reception for all three shows, Fri., Dec. 14, 6-10 p.m. West Tampa Center for the Arts, in the historic former Santaella Cigar Factory, 1906 N. Armenia Ave., Tampa, 813-453-4381, [five-art.com](http://five-art.com).