

Art Review



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Works at Portait Society Gallery

Dali, Masson and Milwaukee Artists at David Barnett, Portrait Society Galleries

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Surrealism and artistic voyeurism provide the impetus for two exhibitions at Milwaukee galleries. Featuring images in print, pen, pencil, ink and watercolor that permeate works on paper, David Barnett Gallery and Portrait Society Gallery offer divergent creative viewpoints. One exhibit explores famous finished prints, while the other looks at affordable works in progress.

"Masters of Surrealism" at David Barnett Gallery (through Jan. 9, 2010) mounts lithographs by the legendary Salvador Dali and a contemporary, Andre Masson. Dedicated to this painting movement that draws inspiration from dreams and memories but uses representational images often set in fantastical landscapes, Dali and Masson experimented with a variety of mediums and techniques. Colored and limited edition lithographs on Arches paper showcase selected prints from the artists' celebrated careers.

Dali reinterprets his more familiar surrealist style in *Signs of the Zodiac* (1967). Sparse, fluid brush strokes delineated by spontaneous lines create the astrological creatures and figures set in abstract backgrounds detailed with energetic starbursts and cloud swirls. Whether portraying humans or animals, these prints exude a vibrant life. Contrasted with Dali's highly perfected and detailed oils, these lithographs capture his emotive and uninhibited strokes.

Another series in colored woodcuts on paper depicts Dali the master draftsman in small artworks from "The Divine Comedy Series" (1950). These illustrative prints portray figures from Dante's novel, including *The Misers*, *The Faithful Angels* and *Dante and Beatrice*.

Masson's lithographs complement Dali's pictures through the use of automatic script, a surrealist variant that relies on producing images immediately drawn from subconscious streams of thought. His exotic women distinguish the *Je Reve (I Dream) Portfolio* (1975), which reveals curvaceous contour lines filled in with colors that resemble bold crayon markings. These nudes include portraits of *Viviane*, *D'Eve* and *La Ventienne*, women surrounded by landscapes depicting bounteous flowers, buds, floating musical notations and the hills of rounded breasts—lyrical scenes composed through delicate lines from Masson's dreams.

Studying these masterworks by Dali and Masson presents additional insight into their diverse aesthetic influences. The Barnett Gallery might be better served by showing their special exhibitions in one gallery specifically for this purpose, however, so visitors could optimally view these exceptional portfolios.

Portrait Society Gallery recently opened an exhibition titled "The Intimate Page" in Gallery A (through Jan. 4, 2010), which requested sketchbook drawings from 61 local and national artists. These very personal renderings on paper, including square cocktail napkins, invite the viewer to experience the inner workings of the artistic mind.

Director Debra Brehmer co-curated the exhibition with Natanya Blanck, and the two women organized this massive collection of white sketchbook paper on black gallery walls. This imaginative milieu holds zoo drawings and figure studies by Katie Musoff, New York portraits penned with Sharpies in bars by Carri Skoczek, ink drawings by Barry Carlsen and charcoal render-

ings from Milwaukee's Brady Street by Chris Miller.

Linear images in silver and gold Mylar tape depict Kathryn E. Martin's first thoughts for her room-sized installations. Even traditional travel impressions are drawn with exultant immediacy. These inspired scraps of paper dominate the diminutive space with an overwhelming amount of artwork to appreciate.

Creatively dividing the artwork by subject categories—travel, flowers, animals, landscapes, figure studies and preparatory work—the curators present the raw working materials, as well as the unfinished intellectual and visual process connected to making art, in this rare viewing privilege. A distinguished array of artists willingly consented to share their private images, never before seen and ready for purchase.

Across the hall, an exhibition in Gallery B features Michael Kasun and UW-Milwaukee graduate Amy O'Neill in "A Flock of Birds" (through Jan. 4, 2010). By placing her roosters and hens in the abstract context of the corner of a room or chiaroscuro shadows, O'Neill elevates these humble creatures to elegance in her miniature oils. Kasun adorns a robin egg blue wall with 36 new bird paintings on wood.

In the hallway between the two galleries, Fred Bell continues his oil on Masonite series where nine new paintings focus on one main theme. This fifth-floor treasure in the Marshall Building exudes Brehmer's unique passion for displaying a cultural dialogue and encouraging a vibrant conversation that preserves artists and community.