

TILLOU FINE ART

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Art review: Air of mystery at Hallwalls

Two artists cast work in a fairy-tale light

by Cynnie Gaasch

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The artworks of Megan Greene and Kelly Richardson, currently being presented in Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, come together successfully through their mutual air of mystery and fiction.

Thoughtful execution is evident in both artists' work, as is an affinity for fairy-tale invention.

Richardson, a Canadian artist and resident of the United Kingdom, harnesses the magic available in digitally manipulating videos. Her works are, at first glance, simple one-liners. Given time, however, the most appealing of her works unfold into a world between fantasy and reality, something reminiscent of the "Wizard of Oz."

"Ferman Drive" (2005) twists your reality, when, after a slow drive in suburbia, you finally come upon a house that is spinning in place. The piece seems to say, "Just when you get comfortable, the rug will be pulled out from under you." The piece is impressive for its manipulation of the medium but is just as appealing as Richardson's videos that allow for less constricted discovery.

"Exiles of the Shattered Star" (2006) is at once a beautiful and sad moment, a video that allows the viewer to create endless narratives. The most mysterious, evocative and subtle of the works by Richardson, it is also the most intriguing. The pieces of shattered star fall gracefully over a placid lake in remote mountainous terrain. There is no evidence of destruction, and so the question is forced: "Does a tree make a sound when it falls in the woods if no one is there to hear it?" This moment of drama could be the beginning of the end of the world. It could be a lonely phenomenon undiscovered by human eyes. Or it could be the visual representation of a celebrity's fall from favor.

If Richardson's works are "The Wizard of Oz" in Technicolor, then Greene's work is "The House of Seven Gables" in black and white.

Greene, a Buffalo native, now lives in Brooklyn. She titles this body of work "Rappacini's Daughter," after the short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, known for his examination of Puritan life and witchcraft in "The Scarlet Letter."

And witchcraft seems a natural source for inspiration in these drawings, which literally come out of the darkness, made with white pencil and gouache on large sheets of black paper. The drawings mix old-world hunting trophies with medals of honor, guns, swords, feathers, fur, rose petals and chicken feet. She masses the various items into a fictional new icon that is simultaneously ancient and futuristic.

Greene's work seems perfectly suited for a dark library decorated by a hunter's lifetime of conquests.

"Untitled (With Pig Ear)," showcases Megan Greene's adept use of her materials to describe something not entirely natural.

"With Pig Ear" is a conglomeration of trophies and amulets of good luck. Each item marking some kind of power, mysterious or proven, melds into an emblem of intriguing reverence.

The drawing of this piece is just barely there. Nothing is overworked, and the image simply appears out of the darkness of black paper, appropriately magical in its otherworldliness. The emblems are highlighted by the drawing of a few featured items, like a chicken's foot, that float a bit higher on the surface. These items shift in and out of being one with the more solid form of a trophy, framed by a set of horns resembling a ram and swathed in fabric like the folds of a wedding gown or your most decorative piece of furniture.

