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'Printstallation' brings giant gallery-filling printed wall to Constellation Studios

L. KENT WOLGAMOTT Lincoln Journal Star Feb 21, 2019

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Taryn McMahon's "printstallation" at Constellation Studios includes "Hanging Gardens" in the center and her prints on the walls.

Three giant panels of digitally printed, translucent Japanese paper hang from a rod and gently curve onto the Constellation Studios floor.

With irregularly shaped holes and its edges curling to the front and back, the panels are covered with imagery that appears to come from inside a greenhouse, with the glass panels above and leaves and branches below.

The piece is called “Hanging Gardens,” likely a clever reference to the fabled ancient Babylonian gardens, and it’s the centerpiece of “Field of Vision,” an exhibition from Ohio printmaker Taryn McMahon.

“I’m calling this a ‘printstallation,’ said Constellation owner Karen Kunc. “It’s a way to get the prints off the walls and into the environment.”

That’s the best possible description for the show, which is unique in my experience. I’ve seen plenty of mixed media installations, some comprised of just painting or sculpture, but never one of prints.

“Hanging Gardens,” which was hung by Kunc after McMahon’s flight to Nebraska was canceled by a winter storm, takes full advantage of the studios’ nontraditional space, spilling out toward the viewer and rising toward the ceiling to create a kind of wall -- albeit one with spaces -- that defines its own environment.

And that wall is covered with layers of images, some dots that may be geographic in origin, along with the architectural depiction in whites and the dark greens, blues and browns of the botanical imagery.

Looking through the wall at the workshop behind it creates a clash between the created environment and the “real world,” simultaneously emphasizing both the naturalness of the prints and their artificiality.

From the back, the paper becomes translucent, turning “Hanging Gardens” into a piece about the support -- “they’re so delicate and fragile, but they’re quite durable,” Kunc said -- and the uncertainty of imagery.

Surrounding “Hanging Gardens” on the gallery walls are a series of traditional prints in which McMahon explores the themes and imagery found in the large piece -- sometimes using collage to combine the elements, others utilizing stencils to create architectural precision while flipping between positive and negative imagery and space.

The prints alone could have made a strong exhibition. McMahon, who teaches at Kent State University, is a fine technical printmaker and has hit on a subject matter that is effectively addressed via the layering of printmaking.

But “Hanging Gardens” makes “Field of Vision” unique, at least for Lincoln, and ranks as one of the two or three most impressive uses of the Constellation Studio space that I've seen.

McMahon notably applied to do the “printstallation” at Constellation rather than being recruited by Kunc, who is a major figure in printmaking nationally and internationally.

“This is one of the things I wanted to have happen here,” said Kunc, who, six years ago, opened the gallery, printmaking studio and classroom at 2055 O St. “That artists could see this is an interesting room that has all kinds of possibilities for exhibitions. People are now aware of Constellation Studios in the printmaking world. And we’ll, hopefully, be seeing more and more people apply.”

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If You Go

What: "Field of Vision" by Taryn McMahon

Where: Constellation Studios, 2055 O St.

When: Through March 30

Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, if gallery is attended, or by appointment by email at hello@constellation-studios.net or phone at 402-438-0049

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