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Six grandes dames mount the best M.F.A. show in recent memory

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By AMANDA TIGNER

At the opening reception for the Michigan State University Master of Fine Arts Exhibition, one could sense that something special was taking place. This show is a real beauty, painstakingly hung, professional and polished. None of the M.F.A. shows in recent memory have compared to the 2005 exhibit.

It is hard to believe that this is the work of students — Mara Jevera Fulmer, Katherine Krcmarik, Renee Robbins, Lisa Simon, Michelle Word and Meng-Shu You.

One of the show's many strengths is the cohesiveness of this group. Looking at the work of the painting candidates especially, one can read the daily exchange of ideas that improved their work individually and collectively.

Shared experience does not equal a lack of variety, however, and each has pursued different conceptual avenues. While they are all very interested in nature, Word explores the close relationship of nature and chaos, Simon the sublime aspects of nature, and Robbins the landscape as an indicator of self. The media employed by each of the painting candidates also varies tremendously, adding visual interest.

Word presents collages on birch panel

2005 Master of Fine Arts Exhibition
On display at Kresge Art Museum on
the MSU campus through April 10.
Admission is free. For further
information call (517) 355-7631 or
visit artmuseum.msu.edu.



rather than traditional paintings. These large, abstract collages, many four-by-four feet, fascinate with their intricacy and materials. Word adds polish and displays her technical skill through handcrafted frames.



Courtesy Kresge Art Museum.
"Below the Surface", acrylic and mixed media on canvas
by Renee Robbins.

Robbins superimposes new topographies over existing landscapes through the application of found materials such as lace, sewing patterns and even human teeth, onto her paintings. Five exquisitely colored woodcuts also show Robbins versatility as a printmaker.

Simon has created an installation fusing painting and ceramics, breaking down the artificial boundaries of her discipline. Her environment features walls made of abstract paintings on massive panels that hint at a spiritual encounter with nature. In the center of the space, weird and wonderful ceramic objects seem to grow organically from their painted platform.

Adding extra spice to this year's exhibition is Meng-Shu You's installation. Exploring what she calls the "Coca-colonization" of American culture in her native Taiwan, You's pieces range from her trademark red, white and blue shopping carts filled with glazed bricks embellished with Chinese calligraphy, to a mock supermarket display of 700 Coke bottles cast in porcelain. Playing with the seepage of Western consumer imagery into Asian art, each bottle is painted in the traditional Chinese blue and white style, a look that started a craze for Chinese culture in the West centuries ago.

Fulmer and Krcmarik, the graphic designers, explore facets of contemporary life like the Internet and post-9/11 culture. Making use of very different strategies, Krcmarik invites the viewer to interact with her work via computer, while Fulmer has created an enclosed environment that the viewer can enter to experience sound and moving images.

Fresh and spirited, yet informed by rigorous research in fields from plant biology to anthropology and social justice, the annual MSU M.F.A. Exhibition is always a chance to see some of the most innovative art in the Lansing area. This year's offering is exceptionally fine, both conceptually and formally. Certainly the best in the past five years, it is well worth a visit.

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