



LEFT

Watch The Dolphins Play

by Russell Crotty, 2007, ink and watercolor on paper on fiberglass sphere 24 x 24 x 24. Courtesy CRG Gallery, New York, New York. All artwork this article courtesy Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York, New York.

"The text that appears on this image was extracted from real-estate ads in local Malibu papers," Roberts explains. "And the composition is based on the Malibu coastline. The text starts out tiny and grows and grows, indicating his rage about the overdevelopment of the area."

BELOW

A Biased and Incomplete Guide to Some Critics

by William Powhida, 2011, watercolor, graphite, and colored pencils on paper, 18¾ x 14¾.

A RECENT EXHIBITION AT MORGAN LEHMAN GALLERY, IN NEW YORK CITY, DISPLAYS A RANGE OF APPROACHES TO WATERCOLOR THAT CHALLENGE POPULAR PRECONCEPTIONS.



The Chelsea neighborhood of New York City is well known for the myriad art galleries located in renovated warehouses and loft spaces. In a city full of people who've seen it all, the biggest challenge that curators and gallery directors face is procuring work that isn't just well executed but also fresh, unique, and able to stand out among the multitude. This summer, Morgan Lehman Gallery did all of this and more when it mounted "Contemporary Watercolor." Featuring work by more than 25 artists, the exhibition demonstrates the diversity and possibility offered by the medium.

"Drawing has been enjoying wonderful and much deserved recognition in recent years, but watercolor is still getting short shrift in the contemporary-art world," says exhibition guest curator Veronica Roberts. "It's considered 'uncool,' and frequently associated with saccharine subjects. For this show I was interested in work that subverted these expectations and made a statement." As the adjunct associate curator of contemporary art at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Roberts makes a living staying

"Contemporary Watercolor"

RE-WRITING A BAD RAP



abreast of current trends and having a bit of a hand in setting new ones. Being based in New York, she knows how tempting it can be to stick with artists close to home, but for this exhibition, she began with a wide search, scouring the country to find innovative artists who have yet to become household names. The fruits of her research can be seen in the exhibition roster, which includes artists from California, Minneapolis, Seattle, New Orleans, and London.

“In almost every instance I was able to do a studio visit with the artist as well,” Roberts notes. “It helped me really get to know their work and see how not just their art but their backgrounds and personal stories fit into the show as a whole.” The geographic diversity also helps to set this show apart from many of the others in



ABOVE

On Patrol

by Kelly Inouye, 2012, watercolor, 22 x 30.

This painting is part of Inouye’s Sitcom Series, which the artist has worked on intermittently for the last several years. “The idea came about through conversations with coworkers and friends about why we remembered so many trivial details from these shows yet frequently forgot more important things like social security numbers or impending deadlines,” the artist says. “I started using watercolor in its loosest form to depict these characters in an effort to amplify that sense of odd sentimentality and test the boundaries of just how much information was needed to spark recognition.”

ABOVE

Untitled

by Firelei Báez, 2010–2011, gouache and ink on paper, 84 x 36.

Báez is originally from the Dominican Republic but spent much of her life in New York City, where she still lives and works. “She’s really interested in representations of race and gender, particularly among women of the African Diaspora,” Roberts notes. “This work is part of a series called Geographic Delay, in which she creates life-size paintings of women who march in the West Indian parade in Brooklyn. The tattoos that adorn the subject’s body are of the artist’s own design.”



OPPOSITE PAGE

Blue Diamond

by Ben Blatt, 2012, watercolor, gouache, ink, and colored pencil on paper, 22¼ x 22¾. Courtesy Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton, New York.

Blatt's work fuses the past and present, demonstrating his interest in such subjects as Renaissance tapestry and digital imagery.

RIGHT

Crystal Birds

by Maki Tamura, 2010, watercolor and glitter on handmade paper, 12 x 12 x 3.



Chelsea, bringing in an audience who may be more curious about the artists than the medium itself.

Regardless of one's interests, the wide-ranging works on display give audiences much to think about. In his three-dimensional piece *Watch the Dolphins Play*, California artist Russell Crotty comments on the rapidly changing and over-developed landscape along the Malibu coastline. In *On Patrol*, Kelly Inouye deftly manipulates the medium's fluidity to "loosely conjure the stars of the sitcom *CHiPs*," says Roberts. "Kelly turns the seeming 'simplicity' of the medium on its head, showing you just how little information is needed to establish a likeness." The exhibition—which also marks the gallery's 10th anniversary—not only demonstrates both the depth and breadth of the fine-art world outside of New York City but also offer compelling evidence of how contemporary artists are revitalizing watercolor in the 21st century.



LEFT

Kandiland I

by Aubrey Learner, 2012, watercolor on gessoed paper, 40 x 35. Courtesy Eli Ridgway Gallery, San Francisco, California.

This painting marks Learner's first exhibition in New York City. The Bay Area artist recently earned her M.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute, and her work demonstrates her undergraduate interest in biology and fine art. "This piece really explores the ideas of consumption and ideals female beauty," says Roberts. "The chewed gum, taffy, and candies, with insects and mice that seem to gnaw at them. But there's also something fun about it, with its shape like a corset and the bright colors. It's very subversive."

RIGHT

Untitled

by Matthew Fox, 2009-2012, watercolor, acrylic, ink marker, gouache, graphite, colored pencil, and crayon on paper, cardboard, archival glue, and aluminum light stand, 72 x 22 x 12.

Find Out More

"Contemporary Watercolor" was on view at Morgan Lehman Gallery July 12 through August 17. For more information on the gallery or the artists in the exhibition, visit www.morganlehmangallery.com.

