

The Owl and the Nightingale; a visual story in two parts; Malcolm Bray and Harry Georgeson at New Hope Arts Center: March 7 through March 28, closing reception with music by Andrew Wilkinson.

When one first approaches this exhibit it seems disparate, but upon closer inspection, we realize that while inhabiting the same space, this exhibit is not incongruous. There is indeed a balance and an education to be had here.

We have the owl; Harry Georgeson, who has embraced both the classical and the modern. An Australian from Greek Ancestry, he was inspired early in life by a trip to Egypt where he was exposed to many Egyptian, Greek Hellenistic, and Greco/Roman examples of classical work. Later Brancusi, and Rodin became influences as well (also from the classical tradition). He studied with well-known sculptor Sydney Geist at the Studio School in New York where he acquired his aesthetic and refined his technique.

Georgeson is a bit of a master at exploring historical backgrounds, classical themes, and mythology as is exemplified in his novelistic approach to the New York City Night Mask portraiture series. Georgeson is methodical in his approach to sculpture. He moves from plaster, clay, and wax which are cast almost exclusively in bronze, (with a few exceptional pieces in marble), and still casts his work in the oldest foundry in New York. He is not a traditionalist by his own admission and yet still provides examples of what comes to mind when one thinks of as classical sculpture. Within Georgeson's "Lagoon Horizon" we see a rather formalist bronze sculpture but without the craggy lines of a Rodin, nor the bowed, almost alien heads of Brancusi. Rather, we experience super clean lines and the innocence of the two subjects and a sphere (beach ball) as they stand within the water that surrounds them. This work is not static; it moves, it's lyrical, and it moves us as well, which is one of the primary functions of art. With a modicum of imagination the viewer can create their own stories.

Georgeson's work is represented in many collections world-wide, including the National collection in Canberra, Australia and numerous public and private collections in Europe, Australia, and the US.

The Nightingale: Malcolm Bray: This is a bird singing randomly in the night... not as random as one might think, but orchestrated in its own personal manner.

Bray's work spans decades and has moved forward consistently. The paintings featured in this exhibit were ostensibly to be largely black and white. Although not entirely black and white, they do reflect his exploration of positive and negative space, not necessarily in the tradition of Franz Kline. "River Hull at Low Tide" is a painting that draws one in. A balanced composition with broken lines and great depth. Perhaps a hint at something familiar, but probably just your wish. In "Fox and Hounds" one asks, where does the eye go first? We might be drawn to the center; the "hot spot", but our eye travels around until we embrace the whole of the composition. Our visual perception of light and dark generates depth and as such a dynamic, which engenders a subtle sense of foreground and background. Like music, this creates tension which seems to be an ongoing theme in this work. Bray acknowledges some important influences from early on in his career. Though largely self-taught, de Kooning, Pollock, and even Picasso, who, (due to his various phases has affected many artists) all play a role in Bray's development.

Bray intuitively embraces the discord and harmony of the human condition, and endeavors to follow the reason for it to be what it is: the consequence of the door ajar and choosing whether or not to go through it seems to be a part of the investigation and motivation. There is a clear rhythm to Bray's paintings. They are dramatic yet contemplative.

In this work Bray uses somber tones, yet not brooding or laden with angst. His use of paint is often sparse; the canvases are not built up in the tradition of the formalist painters, Olitski, Bannard or Lefens.

These aren't about the grand expression of the brushstroke. Rather, they embody a more circumspect approach to the use of materials. Superstructure, like old architecture which retains a part of its former glory, are important components of the paintings. Viewing Bray's paintings are akin to re-reading an old book or re-viewing an old film; each time they present something not previously seen.

There is always something new to see. Upon viewing abstract art one often searches for the familiar. A waterfall perhaps, or the hint of an animal or human form. Like cloud watching, one seeks something transient and moving - quasi-representational. However, seek as one may, there is nothing of that. Form, freeing up the paint, the elements of composition; line, harmony, balance, etc., are always present, however clandestine.

Duncan LaPlante writes on art and the humanities.