

ART REVIEW

Two shows at Sherry Leedy combine images and text with mixed results

By BLAIR SCHULMAN
Special to The Star

"Journo Expressionism" is my term for the prominent role of words in many recent art shows.

Lesley Dill, for example, who is showing at the Byron Cohen Gallery, uses "visible language" in her work.

At Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, artists Tanya Hartman and Cindy Kane also combine images with text.

Kane's "The Helmet Project" features 49 used steel helmets decoupage with handwritten notes and travel artifacts donated by journalists covering conflicts from World War II to Iraq. The Martha's Vineyard-based artist added her own painted butterflies, eyes and birds. Black, yellow or safety-orange colors accent the rims of the helmets.

Suspended from thin wire, the helmets hang in two rows, much like a military regiment, allowing viewers to observe each up close.

"I have always been drawn to the role that journalists play in informing us about the events that shape history and the great tradition of the war correspondent. ... It is the things that journalists save which give the installation a sense of intimacy," Kane wrote in an e-mail.

Yet with so much random content imposed on small surfaces, the intimacy Kane wants to evoke is best achieved when her imagery is the helmet's main focus. The text elements, including flight information, press passes and assorted notes in different languages, give the work a gimmicky feel and dilute the impact. The effect is of a collection of paperwork with no place else to go.

In her "Rhyming the Lines" series, Kansas City artist Tanya Hartman tells a story and conveys an intimate sense of self.

Hand-stitched and incorporating oil paint, ink, gesso and watercolor, the works appear at first to be a hodgepodge, like pieces of a mosaic, but up close they become visually coherent.

A series of assemblages, "Reliquary" (2000-ongoing), unites text within tightly coiled patterns resembling amoebas or cells. Each pattern contains a word in the center.

"I always imagined each cell in my body would have a tiny letter embedded in it," Hartman says on her Web site. "The perception that each cell contained a sacred word center led to the idea of ... embedding them with collaged language."

"I Wrote a Short Story" (2003-ongoing) features collaged text with stitching and resembles a child's notebook. "What Was Beautiful" (1999-ongoing) has the familiarity of a quilt. While comforting, the work's creamy textures, lines and patchwork patterns add up to something so fragile it seems it might disintegrate if touched. Hartman's entire oeuvre is soothing to the eye and mind.

With images and text in balance, it embodies Journo Expressionism at its best.

the shows

"Cindy Kane: The Helmet Project" and "Tanya Hartman: Rhyming the Lines" continue at Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, 2004 Baltimore Ave., through Feb. 27. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and by appointment. For information, call