

Rinaldi: Golden Triangle a serious contender for Denver's best gallery scene in 2017

Two current exhibits show why the neighborhood has remained a steady draw for art fans

By Ray Mark Rinaldi · Dec 6, 2017, 4:40 pm

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Barbara Sorensen, "White Ripples." (Provided by Walker Fine Art)

Several neighborhoods claim to be the center of Denver's visual art scene, and there's more to the positioning than simple bragging rights. If a district can market itself as the best gallery destination in town, locals will head there in big numbers to browse the goods on Saturday afternoons and hotel concierges will steer tourists that way to purchase the upscale souvenirs travelers love to collect on the road. It's really about business.

Truth is, the city's neighborhoods tend to trade off the title depending on the momentum they have at the moment, and the areas around Cherry Creek North, Santa Fe Drive and River North have all had their time at the top.

These days, the Golden Triangle is the serious contender. While other districts have been turned upside down by gentrification, the triangle has remained a reliable place to see good work, due mostly to the fact that four of the city's most venerable and trusted dealers call it home, with William Havu, Sandra Phillips, Tina Goodwin and Bobbi Walker all running namesake businesses within a few blocks of each other.

The neighborhood also happens to overlap geographically with the city's well-hyped Museum District, which means it hones in on the arty aura of the Clyfford Still Museum, the Denver Art Museum, The Art hotel and, starting in March, the newly relocated Kirkland Museum.

Two current group shows explain the success. Both Walker Fine Art and William Havu Gallery are showing the sort of work that defines the neighborhood at its core: high-quality, locally made art that ranges from easily accessible to pleasantly challenging.



Laura Guese, "Lavender Escape." (Provided by Walker Fine Art)

At Walker, lighter than air

The Walker show, "Infinite Layers," makes for one of those nice midday visits, with the six artists on the walls blending together breezily. There's a certain serenity to everything on display, which makes it right at home in Walker's ethereal white cube on the first floor of the Prado condominium tower.

Bobbi Walker's longevity — she's been in business for 15 years — is largely due to the fact that she attaches her brand to artists at different points in their careers. That means she always has a steady supply of sure-sell veterans on her roster as well as some new names to keep things interesting.

New this time is Laura Guese, who has spent the past few years building a reputation for her abstract cloud paintings. Guese works primarily at the bottom of her canvases, layering down cottony lines in alternating, light-and-dark hues of blue, gray and white. The upper part of the canvas, the sky part, is rendered in nearly pure shades of blue with very little variation of color. The contrast between puffy vapor below and stark sky above is eye-catching. So is her perspective; her best pieces depict clouds as if they are horizons and we are looking at them from cloud level.

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Guese experiments with different undulations and shading, and that means some works succeed better than others. Her ideas shine when her strokes are precise and factual, and they become more ordinary when her oil paint is murkily applied. But artists are supposed to explore, and it will be interesting to watch her career grow and to see what she is capable of beyond these reliable clouds.

At the other end of the career spectrum is long-established Colorado sculptor Barbara Sorensen, who is showing recent three-dimensional wall pieces. It's terrific to see this artist, lately known for free-standing wire creations, pushing her forms in new directions. One piece in particular, "Ripples in White III," recycles aluminum tubing into something resembling lush, organic flora. These new works manage to be wild and contained at the same time.

Between Sorensen and Guese is mid-career artist Sabin Aell, whose multilayered abstractions have become recognizable objects around the city. Aell combines shapes that appear organic and floral with others that are crisp and geometric, and they come together into pieces that challenge ideas about shape and surface, and blur the lines between the homemade and the manufactured. Her twist for this exhibit is to build her constructions on automobile windows that have been removed from their frames, giving viewers a new way to see into her ideas. Things float about inside Aell's stratified creations, and the creations float airily in the world around them

Rounding out the exhibit are Chris Richter's atmospheric and intangible oil paintings, Allison Svoboda's processed paintings and collages, and Lindsay Halleckson's involving acrylics on canvas and linen.

At Havu, a bold experiment

Across the street at Havu, the star of the show, titled "Transmutations," is Ryan Magyar, whose recent experiments with oil paint have yielded mesmerizing results. His pieces, largely untitled as to give away nothing in their meaning, challenge viewers to spend some time thinking about both his intent and process.

Magyar has a unique way of doing things, priming his canvas with layer upon layer of gesso, finely sanding each one so that the base of every work appears shiny and polished. He then applies brilliant colors of paint in single, grand gestures with a scraper of some

sort. There is considerable depth to these flat objects: unpredictable, wavy patterns within each color; then tension between those fields of color as they meet; then in the way those fields interact with the polished surface.

There is some lack of cohesion in a few of the works. It doesn't always make aesthetic sense for a glowing green to be next to a cloudy pink, or a patriotic red to stand along side a patriotic blue. They can be jarring in that way.

But there is so much action in these pieces, so much wowing confusion of foreground and background, so much light captured and energized. The nicest thing you can say about a piece of contemporary art is that it will never get old, and these paintings could take a lifetime, well spent, trying to analyze in your mind.

Plan to spend some time looking at them, along with the other work at this worthy Havu show, which includes finely honed, three-dimensional sculptures in stone, steel and wood from Michael Clapper, smoke drawings by Dennis Lee Mitchell and organic, and mixed-media paintings by Naomi Scheck.



Ryan Magyar, Untitled F, oil on canvas. (Wes Magyar, Provided by William Havu Gallery)

"Transmutations" runs through Jan. 7 at Willam Havu Gallery, 1040 Cherokee St. 303-893-2360 or williamhavugallery.com.

"Infinite Layers" continues until Jan. 13 at Walker Fine Art, 300 W. 11th Ave., 303-355-8955 or walkerfineart.com.

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