

The Denver Post  
'Nomos' grabs viewer at Carson show  
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Section: WEEKEND SECTION  
Page: FF-20  
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Caption: PHOTO: Sandy Carson Gallery

This is a detail of Martha Russo's 'Nomos' (1995), a 16-by-8-foot porcelain sculpture on view at the Sandy Carson Gallery. The artist spent more than a week setting up the work. The Sandy Carson Gallery is becoming something of a hotbed for the region's most adventuresome clay sculpture.

A recent exhibition featured exciting ceramic pieces by two up-and-coming talents, Tsehai Johnson and Mia Fetterman-Mulvey, and two large-scale pieces by Martha Russo, including the not-to-be-missed "Nomos," which highlights a soon-to-close, current show titled "Ambient Lux."

Russo, a Denver artist who earned her master of fine arts degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1995, has stood out as one of the stars of every recent group show in which she has participated, such as a juried exhibition last year at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

So it was not surprising to find her among the 20 artists selected for the "2003 Colorado Biennial: 10+10," a wonderfully energetic and often edgy exhibition continuing at the Museum of Contemporary Art/Denver.

None of her selections in any of these earlier shows, though, tops "Nomos," a 16-foot-long, 8-foot-tall wall sculpture that curves dramatically around a corner of the Carson gallery and easily claims its place as the centerpiece of "Ambient Lux."

It is composed of hundreds of irregularly shaped, slightly bent off-white porcelain rods a foot or more long that have a vague biomorphic quality, looking alternately like animal bones or perhaps long, thin gourds or some other kind of dried plants.

Russo spent more than a week at the gallery constructing the work, painstakingly mounting the individual components in a camouflaged peg-board panel and conforming the overall look to the dynamics of the space, an approach that gives it a fresh, vibrant quality.

Although the protruberances lining this highly tactile sculpture almost literally reach and grab the viewer, it does not in any way seem menacing. Instead, viewers who allow the work's visual stimulation and sensuousness to wash over them will feel a pleasing sensory charge.

Because of its site-specific nature, "Nomos" falls somewhere in the gray area between sculpture and a full-fledged, transformative installation, a quality shared by the large-scale pieces of the three other artists in "Ambient Lux," the first offering at the newly renamed gallery.

The Carson-Masuoka Gallery reverted to the Sandy Carson Gallery after Carson's business partner, Mark Masuoka, left recently to head the Bemis Foundation, an internationally recognized artist residency program in Omaha, Neb.

Gwen Laine of Wheat Ridge combines photography and sculpture in inventive ways, this time adhering small, sumptuous black-and-white photographs of clouds onto 4-by-6-inch wooden blocks, each with two holes that allow them to slide along twin vertical metal poles.

In this version of this size-variable sculpture, titled "The Place in Which," she has included 13 of the metal-pole units, each with 10 blocks stacked at the bottom, thus incorporating a total of 130 of the small cloud images and creating a fascinating if enigmatic abacus-like effect.

Christopher Romer of Brooklyn, N.Y., is represented by "Charmers," a wall randomly covered with perhaps a hundred thin, tapered wood sculptures, which, though decidedly new in appearance, look vaguely like objects that might have been created by some primitive culture.

Together, these polychromed pieces, none more than about 2 feet in height, certainly create an interesting visual panorama. But as individual artworks, they are hurt by Romer's over-eagerness to make them pretty.

Rounding out the exhibition are three works by John Garrett of Albuquerque, N.M., including "Guatemala," a wall-mounted mesh curtain that is 6 feet tall and nearly 9 feet wide. While this is certainly not the first such work in this vein, it is certainly a compelling variation on the theme.

It is composed of hundreds of painted aluminum strips and, in some cases, twisted wires, that have been bent into circles about 2 inches across and hooked into identical adjacent circles in a chain-like manner to form an open, loose-hanging kind of metallic fabric.

The swirling, repetitive shapes of all of the interlocking loops and the incorporation of the entire spectrum of colors in bright, gleaming hues, with a seeming emphasis on red, combine to create a kinetic and almost dizzying visual impact.

Carson believes this exhibition is one of the best in the recent history of her gallery, and it is hard to disagree.

Sensory impact

What:Exhibition, "Ambient Lux," sculptures by John Garrett, Gwen Laine, Christopher Romer, Martha Russo

When:Through Aug. 29; 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, noon-4 p.m. Saturdays

Where:Sandy Carson Gallery, 760 Santa Fe Drive

Admission:Free; call 303-573-8585

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