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reviews

'Slash: Paper Under the Knife'

Museum of Arts and Design

Through April 4

Why is it that a paper airplane or a cardboard box built to look like a tank can be more engaging than a metal or wooden model of the same object? Is it the magic of representation? Could it be nostalgia for childhood and for what was once a primary medium of play and self-expression? Is it the simplicity and vulnerability of the medium, or is it its potential to be so much more than it is?

This eclectic show of works by some 50 artists from 16 countries, organized by the museum's chief curator, David Revere McFadden, and assistant curator Laura Stern, is by turns (and often at once) clever, obsessive, beautiful, and forceful. The borders between art, craft, design, and narrative are satisfactorily breached

Dark thoughts are emitted by veteran "word" artist Lesley Dill, whose *Blind Horseman* (2009)—a black horse composed of graphite paper, carbon paper, mulberry paper, Tyvek, thread, and ink, with dangling cut-out letters from an Emily Dickinson poem—brilliantly and disconcertingly unites form and content.

Less disturbing but still intense is German artist Andreas Kocks's reconfiguration of space with huge metallic-looking, graphite-covered cutouts applied as wall drawings. Viewers can mentally assemble and reassemble the pieces as they navigate the room; it's commanding, stormy, and also poetic.

Ingenuity marks the sculpture- and architecture-based works, such as Jane South's paper rendition of industrial machinery; Oliver Herring's collaged-photo life-size standing portrait; and Pietro Ruffo's *Youth of the Hills* (2008), a provocative model of a World War II tank covered with cut-up Hebrew prayer books and topped with paper insects.

Some of the smaller, intensive cuttings seem like ends in themselves, too self-absorbed to say more than what they do, but most are more fascinating than one might expect, like the myth-making, cave-drawing-like cutouts of Andrew Scott Ross; the narrative curtains of Béatrice Coron, with depictions of heaven and hell inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*; and Olafur Eliasson's compelling excavations that seem to turn carved-out books into architecture.

There is one unexpected bit of real entertainment to be found in Rob Carter's video *Stone on Stone* (2009), which documents piece by piece a cardboard reconstruction of the forever-being-completed Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in New York. Adding to the drama is the ecclesiastical music that accompanies the spectacle of construction.

A sense of collaboration and community among people who might have little in common seems to be defining the museum today. Who'd have thought that after all the Sturm und Drang over the reconfiguring and recladding of an eccentric, unbeloved structure, the new museum would become a locus for risk taking, invention, and playfulness—and a testament to the power of fragility?

—Barbara A. MacAdam



Judy Pfaff, *Bogue Lusa*, 2009, paper (Hosho, honeycomb, and Joss), coffee filters, silk flowers, rice-starch paste, and bamboo parasol, dimensions variable.

here. Works range from the operatic and gestural to the painstakingly wrought. Exemplifying the former is Judy Pfaff's showstopping wall hanging—a luxurious outpouring of vividly colored streamers flowing over succulent flowers and honeycombs, altogether defying genres and conjuring the delicacy of Japanese still lifes and the opulent frenzy of nature. At the other end of the spectrum are exercises in compulsive cuttery, as in Adam Fowler's thick, hairy "drawings" and Mark Fox's accumulations of translated letters of transcribed texts.