

VISUAL ARTS

Charlotte Street Visual Artist Award winners get a lot of things right

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BY DANA SELF
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Despite the droll, tongue-in-cheek title “Doing Things Wrong” that heads up Danny Orendorff’s essay for this year’s Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artist Awards exhibition, winners Mike Erickson, Erika Lynne Hanson and Paul Anthony Smith seem to be doing something right.

The three artists are all Kansas City Art Institute graduates and are loosely united in this exhibition by their interest in time — past/present, its movement and stasis — and surveillance.

Erickson’s paintings and ceramic pieces are tethered to art history, emotional anxiety and specific moments in time, such as the Boston Marathon bombing. Smith’s c-prints and single-channel video are devoted to a specific time and place, while Hanson’s landscape installations are expanded by the documentation of time’s passing and measurement, and how time and observation are marked.

Mike Erickson

In addition to making art, Erickson runs the West Bottoms gallery 1522 Saint Louis. Multiple and simultaneous narratives coexist in his paintings and are either highlighted or burdened, depending on your patience, by their extreme titles.

In “Tempestuous Landscape With Mercenary and Refugette — After Giorgione and Bob Thompson — We’re All Normal and We Just want Our Freedoms, Freedom,” a detailed and unknowable woman — does she have three legs? — and a smoking man are joined in an uneasy tapestry of imagery.

Erickson samples style from American painter Bob Thompson’s colorful and fluid abstract approach and subject matter from Italian painter Giorgione’s ambiguous painting “The Tempest,” which appears to be the visual template for this iteration. Erickson’s unsettling painting shares the mysterious pastoral and menacing ambience of Giorgione’s painting.

His faux naïve style may lull one into a sense of accessibility, despite the often impenetrable titles. The text, which can wrestle for dominance over Erickson’s visual message, either amplifies or shrouds the paintings’ meanings.

The painting “A 5th Century Greek Vase With a Depiction of a Visit I Made, to Consult the Oracle at Delphi, About My Nagging Doubts Regarding the Official Story Behind the Boston Marathon Bombing, This Is an Ongoing Issue in My Lives” appears to peaceably coexist with the title, uncovering Erickson’s emotional state at some point in time.

Paul Anthony Smith

Smith has garnered national attention in the past couple of years and enjoyed a solo exhibition in New York’s ZieherSmith Gallery in spring 2013.

The artist, who was born in Jamaica, focuses the work in this exhibition there. He exhibits a film and three c-prints with his self-styled picotage technique, in which he degrades the surface of his images with a ceramic tool. His technique, which obscures and highlights his human subjects, introduces multiple dynamics around these figures.

The three figures in his photographs are from Jamaica’s Port Antonio market, yet the background of each photo is dark and ambiguous. Ghostly and yet corporeally present, the figures become both more and less than they are in life.

Shining and bejeweled-looking, they feel otherworldly, even courtly. And yet, frozen under the weight of the technique, they also feel inanimate and distanced from their humanness.

The mask-like nature of the picotage also suggests the kind of bandages burn victims endure. Staring out from underneath this suffocating camouflage, these individuals seem trapped under the weight of their glittering shells, which isolate but also draw attention to them.

Smith has crafted a complicated visual and conceptual dilemma. Objectified and glorified, the figures no longer seem related to any place or time, but float unanchored and unsustainable.

In his single channel video “Untitled” (2013), Smith focused his camera on the stretch of blacktop leading up to a single-lane bridge in Jamaica that was the view from his grandmother’s home.

That children and adults on foot and bikes, in trucks and cars negotiate this tiny bridge without loss of life is a source of great tension and fascination in this deceptively simple video. At a little more than an hour long, it is both mesmerizing and often boring, with anxiety over who might get run down or collide head on.

The static-view camera captures the mundane and the extraordinary. People and vehicles go about everyday living, and yet, through the camera’s fixation on them, they all become oddly mesmerizing in the brief moments they pass through the camera’s scrutiny.

Erika Lynn Hanson

Hanson, who currently lives in Tempe, Ariz., continues her exploration of narrative installation, land- and seascapes, and textile weaving. Her mediated imagery and simulated reality — photos and videos of videos — asks whether there still exists any true barometer of actual experience.

She also shares Erickson’s devotion to the lengthy title.

In her darkly painted installation room, time stands still and moves in tiny increments. In the large projection “But of the Relationships Between the Measurements of Its Space and the Events of Its Past: Record Number Two,” Hanson’s nature imagery is amplified by sounds of birds, footsteps on loose gravel and other ambient outdoor noise.

That aural experience pinpoints observational technique as we search for the source in the projected image of rocks and a distant vista in her picture of a picture.

Hanson’s projections and photographs typically feature grand expansive views that suggest the natural world’s majesty and power, an allusion to 19th century landscape painting and exploration — think of Hudson River School paintings by Frederic Edwin Church or Thomas Cole.

In one of her typical close-to-the-floor projections, “But of the Relationships Between the Measurements of Its Space and the Events of Its Past,” a single-channel video projection of the tide rising between two large boulders in just under six minutes allows us to almost literally step into that scene. The human scale lends this work intimacy and immediacy.

In “Potential Future Views From the Past,” Hanson positions her characteristic weavings with natural objects. Delicate, with a homespun look in muted earthy colors, the weavings often mimic the landscapes she photographs. Deploying shells, rocks, a miniature giant sequoia, a cactus and other objects, Hanson intercedes on our behalf, collapsing notions of time and distance, authentic and simulated.

In two of her other photographic works Hanson combines nature imagery and material culture — strips of woven beads — reminiscent of the kind one might buy in a national park’s souvenir shop. Hanson’s titles are the digital date and time stamp of the images she lifts from park webcams.

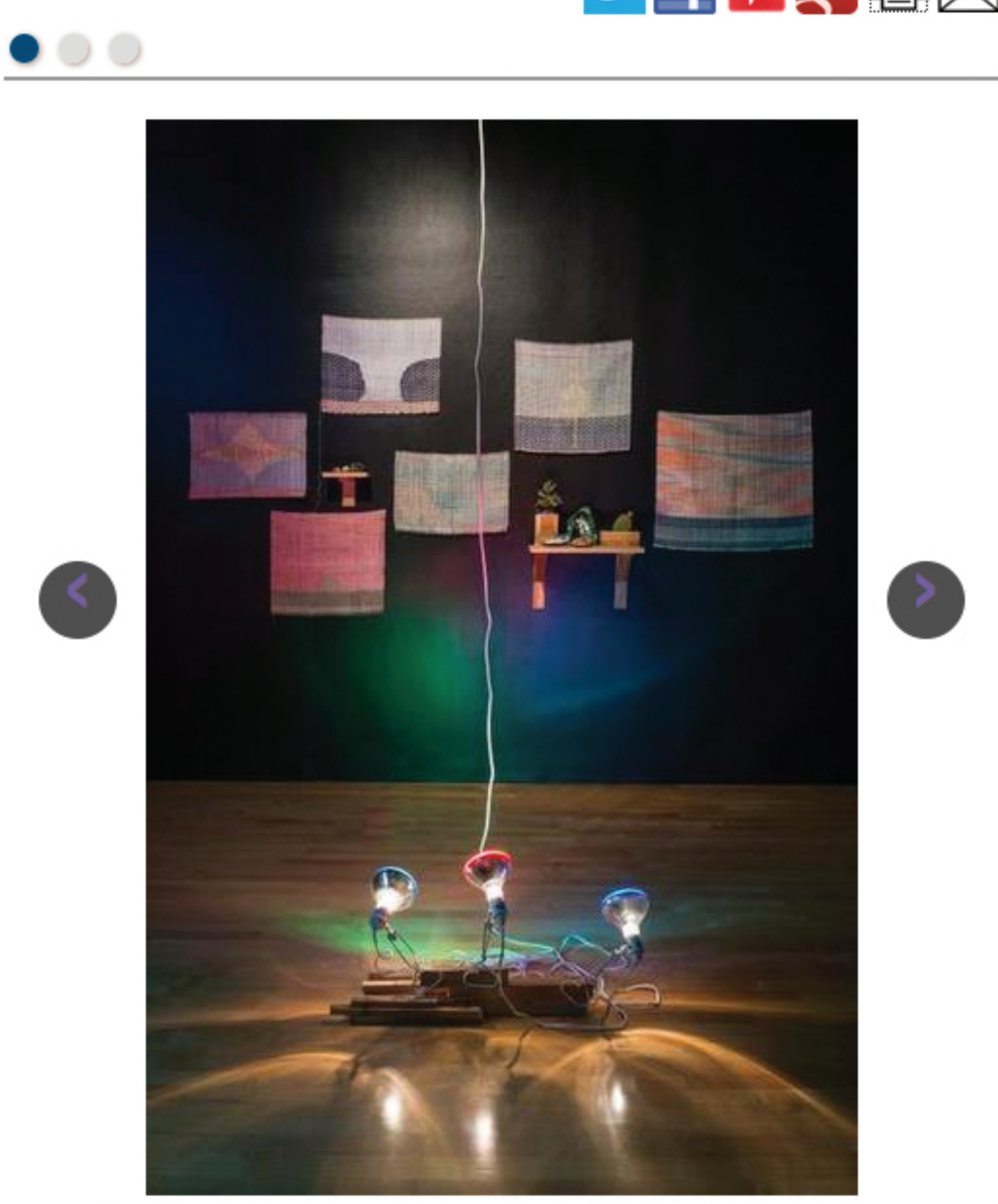
She notes in an email, “the images for “Screen Shot 2013-10-14 at 3.10.06 PM / 2013-07-28 at 10.09.54 PM” were chosen because they represented a span of time that included the government shutdown, which directly affected the parks and caused the live feeds to go down. The feed being a direct connection to a place that I only know through prolonged observation via the Internet, now our primary source for information and, to go further, our experiences.”

These diptychs offer views of different months/days/hours as captured by automation and altered by low resolution, echoing the distortion of memory and experience.

Hanson’s date- and time-stamped images rely on ideas of surveillance and regulation, of what happened when and where, and by whom or what. She and Paul Anthony Smith — and Mike Erickson in his own intuitive, emotionally fraught way — remind us that life and experience, real or simulated, is rarely, if ever, private, undocumented and unmonitored.

On display

The 2013 Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artist Awards exhibition continues at Grand Arts, 1819 Grand Blvd., through Feb. 1. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and by appointment. For more information, call 816-421-6887 or go to GrandArts.com.



E. G. SCHEMPF

Erika Lynne Hanson incorporates landscape-inspired woven linen works in her installation “Potential Future Views From the Past,” (2013), part of the 2013 Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artist Awards exhibition at Grand Arts.

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