

THE NEWEST ROMANTICS: SCULPTORS OF BOTANICAL PHOTOGRAPHY

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The *Newest Romantics*, curated by Jamilee Lacy, is a colorful landscape—bursting with greens and purples and blues. Lacy, a recent transplant from Chicago, has always been interested in cities. When she moved to New England, she was struck by the rural quality of many of its urban environments. This brought to mind the Romantics—John Constable or the Hudson River School painters—and their portrayal of their surroundings. “What does it mean to interact with that notion of the sublime in today’s world?” she wondered.

For this stunning exhibit, Lacy gathered together nine artists all working with photography but as painting, sculpture, installation and collage to see what the Romantics of today would create with their new technology and landscapes mediated by cars and other artificiality. The center of the gallery space, in what was once a 19th-century church, is Frank Poor’s *Missing House—Forsyth, GA*. The structure—modeled after a demolished house he remem-

The *Newest Romantics* installation view. Photo: Lindsey Stapleton.

bered from his childhood—is just a frame, with no walls, ceilings or floor. The “bricks” and “chimneys” are images of the building being consumed by vines.

Spanning the length and width of the room is Amy Beecher’s *Touch Sensitive*—two lenticular structures that act as fences in Lacy’s artistic landscape. One view reveals a close up of a man’s hands—the hairs, lines, tidy fingernails—

the other photos of flowers, inspired by the Dutch still life tradition.

Lining the walls are works by Letha Wilson, Jessica Labatte, Theresa Ganz, Erin Leland, Elizabeth Corkery, Heidi Norton and Clement Valla. In *Untitled (Still Life 1)*, Valla took an “aerial view” of a still life to flatten it out. Norton’s *Blackscape* and *Whitescape* represent the life and death of nature. Corkery, whose parents were both landscapers, uses Victorian garden cutouts in her photographs. And Leland in *What Is Mine Is Yours*, in a nod to the Romantics treating women as an afterthought, shows an empty field with a woman’s feet at the edge.

The Newest Romantics varied interpretations of built and natural landscapes are fresh and bold. It’s a joy to experience, especially on a gloomy winter day.

—Sarah Baker

THE DAVIS. REDISCOVERED

Davis Museum, Wellesley College • Wellesley, MA • wellesley.edu/davismuseum

“The axe for the frozen sea inside us”: this phrase from Kafka sprang to mind during a recent visit to the Rafael Moneo-designed Davis Museum at Wellesley College. On a grey and blustery New England day, a selection of the Davis’s finest holdings, encyclopedic yet approachable, glowed with vitality.

Reconsidering each of nearly 13,000 objects and choosing, studying, conserving and arranging 620 for permanent reinstallation took three years. Eleven galleries over three levels present geographic and chronological collections from ancient Mycenae to contemporary New York. These collections, capsule or expansive, thoughtfully and appealingly arranged, enhance aesthetic and intellectual understanding of the physical objects and of their artistic and historical context.

Each gallery achieves personality through subtly controlled sequence, size, layout and color. Clear pastels set off ancient vases and Tanagra figurines, and a 5th-century floor mosaic from

Antioch, pulsating with colorful pattern, remains vivid. Oceanic and Asian objects, few but compelling, combine formal interest and utilitarian purpose, attributes as well of the rich array of ceremonial and practical objects in the nearby African art galleries.

Throughout, the installations create rhythmic exchanges of openness and intimacy, particularly on Level 4, where jewel-toned galleries suggest private chambers displaying Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque works vibrant in color, passion and historical resonance. A long open space is richly hung with landscapes, still-lives and portraits, and several galleries of 19th-century American and European painting—Copley to Corot—complete a whirlwind tour through centuries.

Level 5’s modern and contemporary masterpieces crystallize the experience: light, architecture, objects, ideas melding in a pure white, wide-open space encouraging encounters from multiple perspectives. Warhol, Beuys, de Kooning, Pollack... many famous, perhaps expected, names.

the *Davis. Rediscovered* installation view. Courtesy of the Davis Museum.

But appropriately enough, enthralling works by Nevelson, Hepworth, Frankenthaler, Martin, Holzer and many other women artists powerfully amplify the collection’s explosive creativity.

Moneo described the Davis as a treasury of artworks “like memories.” From the inlaid stone eyes of an 18th Dynasty mummy case to Iranian-American artist Sara Rahbar’s 2015 *No place like home*, these works challenge and enrich, becoming shards of our own memories, freed from frozen seas by the inspiration and generosity in *the Davis. Rediscovered*.

—Susan Boulanger

REVIEW: *Massachusetts*