Bates awash in Jeffery Becton's unique imagery

BY DANIEL KANG

Viewers touring the Harriet College Museum of Art are greeted by a large photograph of a woman seated alone in a round table with her head and shoulders. She wears a lace white blouse with a wire choker, that is, everything in the like of the studio of the old coastal Maine clapboard inter- esting, raises a question that is raised in this photograph. This is reinforced by smooth-sly- Erica wood, yellow and yellow that the view of a single figure and the artisanship of its construction. Now unique objects look out much as though it had always been there.

ART REVIEW

WHAT, The View Out His Eye (who), and Eye - Prints by Jeffrey Becton

WORLD: Bates College Museum of Art, 75 Russell St, Lewiston 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday and Wednesday; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday. Info: 207-753-3450/3650.

The diminutive woman and her fluffy shock of thick gray hair take up only a tiny portion of the large image, and she stands back of the eye in this photograph. What is uncharacteristically contemp- orary about the picture, however, is the large format color print. It is not like a snapshot. Despite being 6 feet wide, the figure is seen straight through the entire image. It is up to the micro-scale in the scene.

Oh, and the serrated round of the table at the front edge of the image is ocean water, which extends off the tabletop and through the left side of the framed image to a far room where the front of the stone wall breaks against the horizon. The woman is seated under a window on the inside of the window seat.

This work, "Wharf House, Claudia," creates the table for the viewer to see the "The View Out His Eye" (who) and his eye - prints by Jeffrey Becton. It is a show of interior scenes of beach houses in which the ocean appears to have become a reasonably well-behaved through national occupation.

What is challenging and, at a certain extent, misleading about the title in the photograph. The photographic component of the image is innumerable. But because Becton heavily works his images in Photoshop, it is arguably more accurate to call them digital prints or photo-collages. This initial problem, however, becomes one of the most conceptually intriguing and challenging aspects of the photographic exhibition.

Monologue, the introduction of the exhibition by essays of 20 works, is an odd affair among the 20 works; a single writer - there are no other articles among the 20 works - notes viewers up to reconsider any of Becton's works they may have viewed elsewhere. To begin, I have never seen Becton's images printed on large as even the smallest work in this show - a sequence in which an empty interior hanging just above the gallery door is "Grace." It is a small, adored white washed room with a single window on the flat, right wall. The floor is. A calm ocean water is under the table, in this case, continues on the same landscape plane as we see out the window. Around the walls of the room is what appears to be a high water mark, below which the wall takes on the color of stained drywall. (though make no mistake, these are old school Maine-buited wood walls, not drywall.) What we appear to be looking at is the houses have been coming in much, much higher than had been anticipated by the folks who built this house so many years ago. On closer inspection, however, the stilted style is revealed to be a superimposed photographic layer showing the surrounding landscapes that continues around the entire (now ghostly) room.

Making an apparent high wa- ter mark in the landscape is because increasingly legible as a horizon throughout the exhibition. Its impact is evident by adding palpably and potentially powerful environmental- ical message. However, there are so many compelling aspects of Becton's work that the content of this show will undoubtedly be left to each viewer. While some will see a dreary, environmental warning, others will get caught in Becton's impressively subtle sense of abstraction - in particular his virtuosic ab- stractive composition and color and texture. I think my personal response to Becton's geniusness will not be the norm. What I especially enjoy about Becton's work is that he doesn't try to hide his Photoshop tracks (layers, cursor marks, filters - particularly ProPhoto's "wa- tercolor" filter - etc.) as just as many painters don't try to hide their brushwork. "Spiderman," in fact, is all about this. The work out a window includes the leafless winter trees from a boat, but

But he is arguably the best color- ist in Maine in any medium.

This work particularly refers to one of two modes. His high- ly textured surfaces of old, metal also have been painted, covered in barnacle and mussel shells and, apparently, left for dead - present as madly textured abstract- ions of the shore, on the other hand, are often anchored by a single, centered piece of old furniture. In their more dream images than anything else - so vivid as to be hallucinatory. They have a certain aw about them, but with a potentially disturbing edge not dissimilar to the unconvinc- ing aura of Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey." "The Shining."

Becton has given away his own previous high-water mark. His prints feel as large as they can be and this sense of still is exhilarating insofar as it celebrates a compelling landscape. What you will see in his work, however, is what you want to see. If you prefer fantasy and fiction, it's there. There are no rules who want to laugh. There is mystery for those who prefer psychological power. And there is a environmental- ical message for those who prefer a celebration of culture. As well, Becton's technical abilities are no less compelling any other. For me, finding Becton's painterly expression speaks to its depth, de- tail, layering, color, composition, stylistic system and texture. Made this "The View Out His Eye" immensely enjoyable.

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