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GALLERIES

Schooled in digital expression

Young graduates offer audio, video works at 'Academy 2011' survey

BY MARK JENKINS

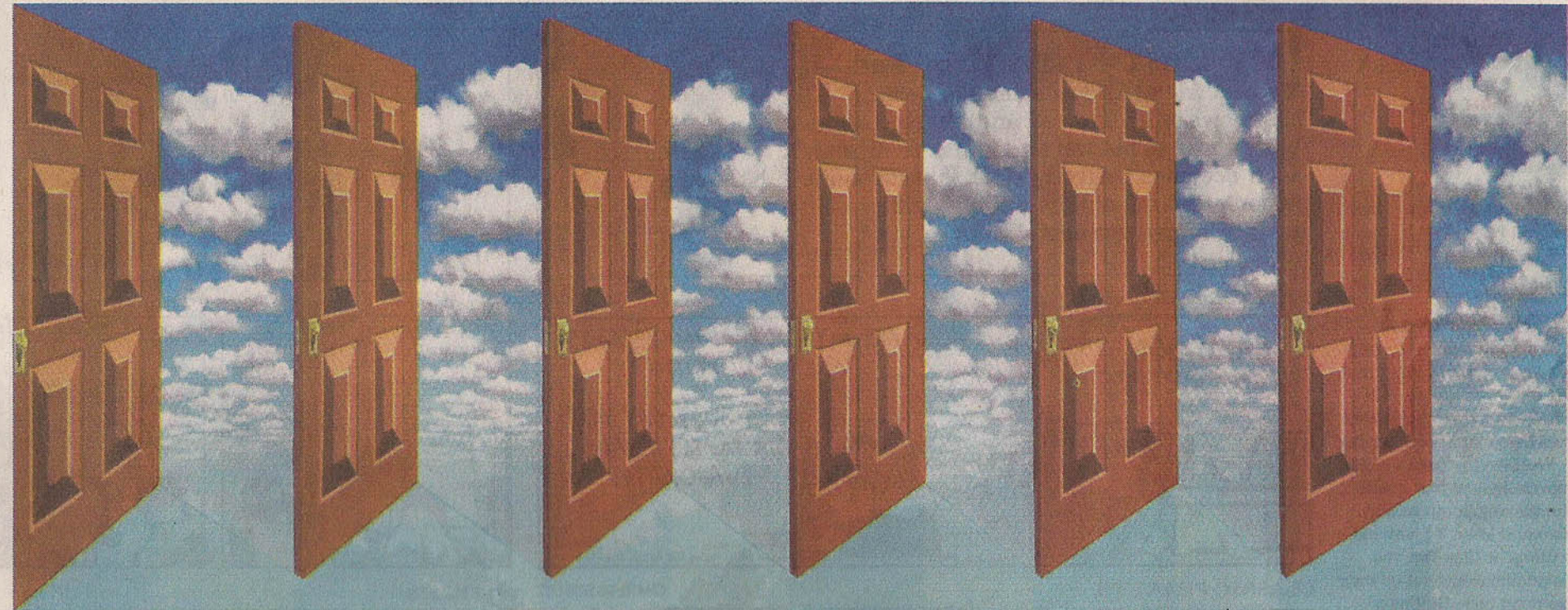
There are rough — and even rusty-edged — pieces in "Academy 2011," the latest edition of Conner Contemporary Art's annual survey of recent local art-school graduates. But these 20 young artists live in a digitized world, so the show is heavy on video and audio — at least one iPod was inevitable — and digital prints. Also to be expected: work about the environment and personal identity.

The front room is dominated by two Asian-born artists, Woojin Chang and Linling Lu. The former's massive "scape" initially looks to be a high-contrast photograph of some stark geologic formation. But it's actually a digital montage of thousands of stylized humanoid shapes, climbing up (and sometimes falling from) teetering, antlike mounds.

Lu's sharp-edged circular canvases forgo social commentary for sheer form. Work from this same series, "One Hundred Melodies of Solitude," is also on display at Carroll Square Gallery, but some of the paintings at Conner have gentler color schemes, with expanses of white or pale blue.

The video work includes Caroline Covington's "Beatings: Baltimore," which combines performance and installation art, and "Dauphin 007," a witty, allusion-heavy tale of a lion king. (Not *the* Lion King; Disney's lawyers needn't drop by.) Also riffing amusingly on show biz is Forest Allread's "Boris and Berry (Video Quilt)," 16 squares of Betty Boop and Nicki Minaj, dancing and falling, and punctuated by a Frankenstein cameo.

The audio pieces include Samuel Scharf's, whose title can't be printed here, in which a babble of various languages resolves to a



COURTESY OF PATRICK HUGHES/LONG VIEW GALLERY

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE: Patrick Hughes's lithograph "Cloudy" has an accordion-fold format, so the gallery viewer sees only doors on one side and only sky on the other.

likewise unprintable word. That expletive gives the work a brash contemporary attitude, but the sound looping is reminiscent of Steve Reich's 1960s experiments.

Camilio Sanin's abstract canvases reach even further back, for a jazzy sensibility that suggests Mondrian (although Sanin's approach is looser and less geometric). In a sense, Jon Malis's work also looks to the past: His brownish digital prints, which evoke organic forms, turn out to be views of brain tissue collected a century ago at St. Elizabeths Hospital. There's one other medical specimen in the show: a freeze-dried dog in Ginny Huo's snarky domestic tableau, "Mother's Table."

Two large sculptures in the courtyard show the continuing allure of heavy metal: Adam Junior's "The Possibility of Connection" is a gravity-defying assemblage of rusted steel twigs, massive yet appealingly delicate. For "Sphere," Dan Goia put a large ball of sod on

a steel frame, reversing the usual pattern of human-made objects anchored in earth.

Simpler, yet evocative, are the photographs of Elle Perez, Melissa Prentki and Sierra Suris. Perez depicts — but doesn't seek to define — people contemplating gender-identity issues, while Prentki considers religious institutions by showing uninhabited scenes from Maryland's St. Mary's Seminary. Suris does street portraits, but she doesn't pick her subjects at random. In the digital world, everyone is categorized: These people come from the "Missed Connections" section of Craigslist.

52 pickup

For \$15, connoisseurs on a budget can get 52 local artists' works in pocket-size form: a pack of cards. That's the premise of "Art Deck-O: DC Playing Card Originals," a project of Touchstone Gallery. But not all these artists are playing from the same deck, and

seeing the pieces on the gallery's walls is more satisfying than shuffling the reproductions.

Only a few of the participating artists emulated the playing-card format, with images designed to be read either right-side-up or upside-down. These include Newton More's "6 of Spades," a pair of vividly red leaves, and Adam Bradley's two-headed "Jack of Spades," which evokes a playing card even though it's a 3-D sculptural piece. At the other extreme, Tony Cowles seems to have simply slapped a four-of-clubs logo on an existing abstract canvas. It's a fine painting, but not much of a card.

Some participants went for over-obvious local icons — George Washington, Abe Lincoln, the Capitol and Ben's Chili Bowl. More cleverly, Jennifer Bishop personifies the seven of hearts as a man on a Metro escalator, holding seven heart-shaped Mylar balloons. Leaving D.C. behind, Jennifer O'Connell's "The Late 8 of Hearts" shows a bear on a bike, arriving at a party at a Victorian-style house; these elements (especially the house) suggest the work of Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki.

Most of the pieces that reproduce well are, not surprisingly, simple images in a hard-edged, magazine-illustration style. Emily Greene Liddle's nifty "10 of Hearts" depicts a cherry with a heart stitched into it, and Chris Bishop's elegantly stylized "8 of Spades" shows a woman who has just taken a bite out of a spade. These transferred to the card format nicely, but look even better in the original.



COURTESY OF JENNIFER BISHOP/TOUCHSTONE GALLERY

SOARING HEARTS: Jennifer Bishop's work avoids cliché.

Playing the angles

It's easy to spot the piece that doesn't fit into "Creative Process," a four-artist Longview Gallery show that closes after this weekend. It's "Cloudy," the only offering from British artist Patrick Hughes. Where the other three participants deal in abstract forms and subtle hues, "Cloudy" mixes pop art's Madison Avenue hyper-realism with surrealism's absurd juxtapositions: a series of red doors hang in mid-air, framed by blue skies and puffy clouds.

The trick — and it's a good one — is that Hughes uses an accordion-fold format to bend the image outward in a series of panels so that it changes with the viewer's vantage point. From the left, this hand-painted lithograph is all doors; from the right, it's all sky.

On the adjacent wall, Sondra Arkin's work performs a similar stunt, although more subtly. Using wax and shellac, Arkin builds membranes of amoeba-like forms on aluminum-composite panels. The sense of depth is intriguing, and the multiple layers ensure shifting perspectives, so the quieter work does relate to Hughes's.

It also complements Eve Stockton's wood blocks, whose floral and oceanic shapes and blue-heavy palette suggest Japanese art, and Natasha Karpinskaia's monotype prints and collages, which have an early-20th-century flavor. On a second or third circuit of the gallery, "Cloudy" still stands out, but all four artists' work flows together surprisingly well.

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ACADEMY 2011

On view through Aug. 22 at Conner Contemporary Art, 1358 Florida Ave. NE. 202-588-8750. www.connercontemporary.com.

ART DECK-O: DC PLAYING CARD ORIGINALS

on view through July 29 at Touchstone Gallery, 901 New York Ave. NW. 202-347-2787. www.touchstonegallery.com.

CREATIVE PROCESS

on view through Sunday at Long View Gallery, 1234 Ninth St. NW. 202-232-4788. www.longviewgallerydc.com.