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# Seeking surreal

Imaginative worlds, some within reach and some beyond, are the focal point of the latest exhibition at Austin, Texas-based Davis Gallery. The works in *Seeking Surreal* are based on imaginings derived from the primordial cypress swamps of the South, the landscape of the rural Midwest or, on a more abstract level, fleeting moments or events that become narratives for the viewer to reflect on.

"The exact time and place is insignificant when looking at the artwork featured in our *Seeking Surreal* [exhibition]," says Kevin Ivester, assistant director at Davis Gallery. "Instead, this collection focuses on exploring the world that is out of reach, far away, or not there at all."

The artists whose works are represented in the show are **Lisa Beaman**, **Faustinus Deraet**, **Chris De Dier**, **Denise M. Fulton**, **Sandra Langston**, **Gladys Poorte**, **Mark Nesmith**, and **Bill Wahlgren**. The show opened June 11 and continues through July 30.

Poorte, based in Austin, says her paintings are the result of a long process of construction. "They originate from an impression, a light or a shadow observed in a fleeting moment, an intriguing object, or an event I observe," says the artist, who has at least three works represented in the show. "I go through a long, intuitive search process to pin down the original idea."

Poorte uses different materials—cardboard, paper, fabrics, wood—to build a model and populate it with found

objects, including hardware, toys, utensils, containers and plastic junk, and objects she makes herself.

"I combine the handcrafted with the manufactured," she continues. "It's like creating a stage where a story will unfold. These stages are the starting point for my paintings. An elusive narrative is suggested. It is up to the viewer to imagine the narrative and the meaning of the work."

Wahlgren's *Cyanotype I - Dusk*, one in a series, explores the richness of traditional oil glazing techniques. At the same time, the oil on canvas echoes the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century vernacular photographs, some of which were printed as blue cyanotypes, and the rural Midwest landscape of the artist's youth, he says.

Beaman, whose *Fly Me To The Moon* is a mixed-media collage, says she begins a paper collage by referencing her library of collected vintage papers and materials, which sets the tone of the work.

"I let the strongest elements direct the story," she says. "For instance, in this piece titled *Fly Me To The Moon*, I was struck by the beautiful black bird image, which garnered a memory of the Beatles' lyrics 'blackbird sings in the dead of the night.'"

Langston's *Gathering* is based on an antique photograph of two young women, possibly sisters, the artist says. "I placed them posing a bit nervously at the base of a large dormant tree, in front of a calm sea," she continues. "The tree is filled with crows,

**1**  
**Bill Wahlgren**,  
*Cyanotype I - Dusk*, oil on  
canvas, 20 x 24"

**2**  
**Lisa Beaman**, *Fly Me To  
The Moon*, mixed media  
collage, 14 x 18"

**3**  
**Gladys Poorte**, *The  
French Musicians*  
*Apartment, Green Room*,  
oil on board, 12¼ x 16¼"

**4**  
**Mark Nesmith**, *Crusade*,  
oil on canvas, 36 x 48"

**5**  
**Sandra Langston**,  
*Gathering*, oil on canvas,  
40 x 30"



1



2



3



4

or ravens, possibly foreshadowing things to come. But I have always thought that a tree full of birds is a metaphor for family, each branch representing the past and also many possible futures as well.”

Nesmith says his painting *Crusade*, set against a steamy cypress swamp and populated by the wildlife of Southwest Texas and Louisiana, is a classic good versus evil tale with a twist.

“Swamps and deep woods are chaotic and enveloping, primordial even,” he says. “As a child, I always felt a sense of being transported to a land before time as I hiked through the big thicket with my father. This seemed like the perfect complement for such an ageless battle.” ●

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