



Artist Joe Wardwell's exhibit continues his exploration of American landscape and rock music with "Big Disgrace" (left) and "Don't Have Nothing For You."

Recycling things, history into stories

William Cordova's show blends harsh and humbling



Mary Buccu McCoy's "Implicit" is in her show, "Manifest."

WILLIAM CORDOVA:
this one's 4U (pa' nosotros)
At: Mills Gallery, Boston
Center for the Arts,
551 Tremont St., through
April 15. 617-426-8835.
www.bcaonline.org

JOE WARDWELL:
Big Disgrace
At: LaMontagne Gallery,
555 E. 2nd St., South Boston,
through April 11. 617-464-
4640, www.lamontagne
gallery.com

MARY BUCCU MCCOY:
Manifest
At: Kingston Gallery,
450 Harrison Ave., through
April 1. 617-423-4113,
www.kingstongallery.com

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

William Cordova is a voracious recycler. The Peruvian-born artist, now based in Miami and New York, uses old scraps of paper, recovered hair elastics, and reclaimed building materials in his show, "William Cordova: this one's 4U (pa' nosotros)," at Mills Gallery at Boston Center for the Arts. He recycles history, too, revisiting and sometimes layering stories charged with violence and activism. The show, put together by independent curator Evan J. Garza, is smart and brutal. It's a graveyard of broken ideals.

The exhibit's centerpiece, "the house that frank lloyd wright built for fred hampton y mark clark," which Cordova showed in

the 2008 Whitney Biennial, is a skeletal rendition of a Chicago apartment in which two Black Panthers, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, were killed by Chicago police in a predawn raid in 1969. It's constructed with two-by-fours, at a skewed angle, nearly filling the gallery. There's an urge to walk around it, and an invitation to walk through it.

That transparency might be a metaphor — Cordova includes, on a high shelf, documents from the FBI's investigation of the shooting, which he acquired through the Freedom of Information Act. It's also ghostly. What it does most effectively, though, is monumentalize, albeit on a human scale, the killing of Hampton and Clark.

Cordova shakes up the idea of monument in "neurolinguistics-

mos (I'm not an abstractionist. I'm not interested in the relationship of color or form or anything else. I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions: tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on. — M. Rothko)." It's a scruffy piece of drywall laid on the floor. The artist has carved into it, drawn over it, and placed stones atop it and in a pile beside it.

His marks create a constellation, bring the galaxies down to earth and onto the scrap heap, and reference the Nazca Lines, shallow designs carved into the ground in the Peruvian desert more than a millennium ago. History telescopes in this piece. So does scale. It's humbling.

Cordova surrounds "neurolinguisticsmos" with "untitled (look for me in the whirlwind)," black-and-blue collages that recall Mark Rothko's paintings. Cordova has embossed names

associated with social justice into each. They're nearly invisible, as if lost to history, but still echoing. This show cries with such echoes.

Paintings that will rock you
Boston painter Joe Wardwell's new show at LaMontagne Gallery is a winner. Wardwell continues to explore his trademark themes of the American landscape and rock 'n' roll, but he does it in ever more challenging ways. In past works, lyrics have blazed across epic landscapes, questioning our society's stewardship of the American wilderness that painters such as Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Church once presented as the embodiment of the sublime.

Now Wardwell makes the text an equal player with the landscape, and there's a third, abstract element, as well. Look at "Big Disgrace," with text bor-

rowed from Queen's "We Will Rock You." Wardwell paints a gorgeous twilighted lake scene, then puts down a stencil and paints a fiery abstraction, so that its steamy reds fill the shadows of the block letters spelling out the text, making them boldly three-dimensional. Sky and lake, meanwhile, unfurl on the surface of the words, but also swim like a mirage below and beyond them. Figure and ground flip dizzily back and forth.

Wardwell's text makes demands on us. How dare we be proprietary about the land's beauty, he seems to be saying, without being responsible for its care? Political messages aside, though, Wardwell's a terrific painter, with riddles of figure and ground, commanding tensions in his canvases, and simply dreamy landscapes, which he brews into nightmares.

Silence and surprise

Mary Buccu McCoy, who this year was awarded a Massachusetts Cultural Council fellowship for painting, makes remarkably subtle works in which perfectly calm surfaces suggest silence, and an occasional smear or glistening patch might be the sound of a gong rippling through that silence. She has a show-stopping exhibit at Kingston Gallery.

"Believer" is a great square panel of inauspicious beige, flat as flat can be, with hardly a mark or a brushstroke in evidence. Except there's a blush of hot pink just beginning to emerge on the right, and just the hint of a finger's trail dawdling down on the left, which suddenly digs deep, as if the paint were icing. That gouge is a luscious shock, interrupting all that flatness. There's also a small shadow of an oval, like a cameo. Each mark is

sly, suggestive, a sensual sigh in the midst of an otherwise quiet canvas.

Sometimes, McCoy goes too far. Her marks, set against such unobtrusive grounds, can trumpet, and it's more effective when they whisper, or at least when they build, like that finger streak in "Believer." "Toward (East)" is another delicious one. The picture plane is a demure lavender. On the right, a great, wet swipe of clear acrylic glistens and crinkles, throwing shallow shadows beneath it. On the left, along the edge, more icing — a painterly mash of white and lavender.

McCoy's uniform backgrounds don't only conjure silence; they suggest propriety, which makes her marks renege. That's why they thrill.

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