

Determined to take their chances

Perrott, Krueger show beauty, nerve, surprises

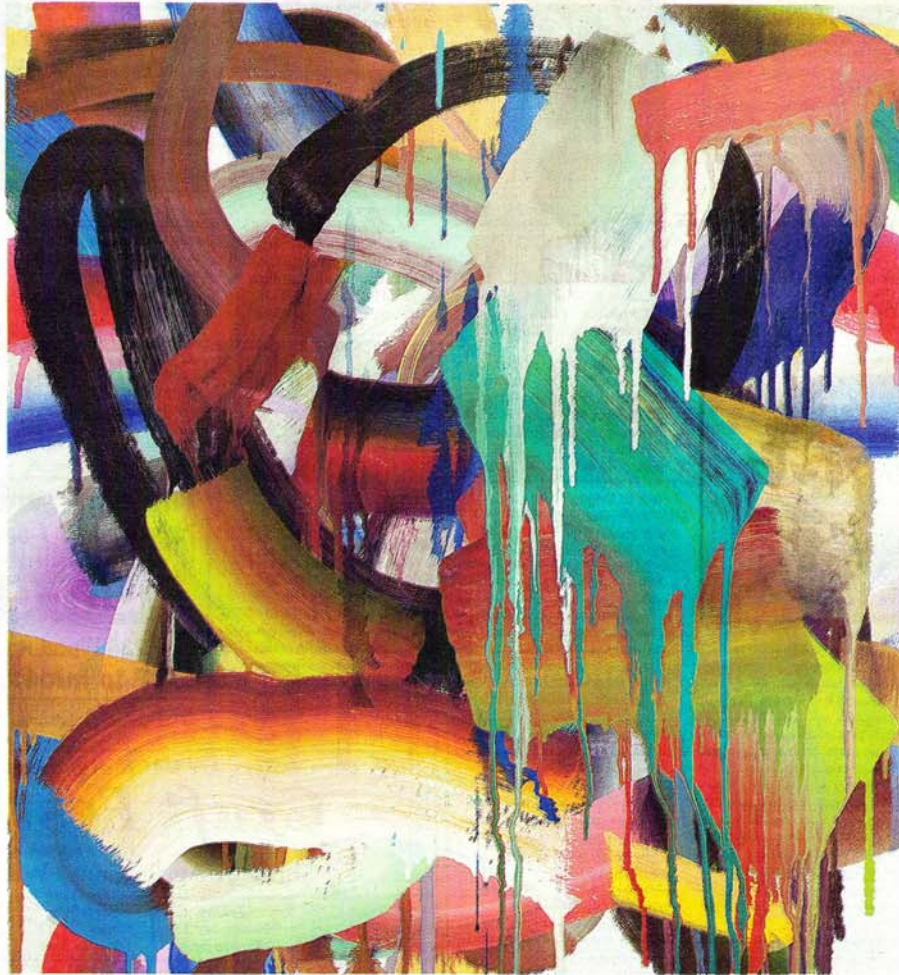
By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Art can sometimes enter into a rarefied conversation with art theory and art history. It must reach outside that box with beauty, freshness, or wit to succeed. Two artists working within today's rubric of painting have shown up now: Jeff Perrott at LaMontagne Gallery and Michael Krueger at Steven Zevitas Gallery.

Perrott, who is both painterly and conceptual, continues his abstract "Random Walk" series. He showed a previous iteration at LaMontagne in 2010. Perrott uses an arbitrary system to direct the course of each brush stroke, working hand in hand with chance. The paintings strive to marry two opposites: the dice-throws' indeterminism championed by composer John Cage, which in essence removed the artist's hand from the composition, and the lush materiality of action painting, which romanticized the artist's hand.

These are mostly smallish paintings, made with fat brushes, often loaded with paint. The gooey, loopy, shiny results, such as the especially dense "RW 114 (Odiris)" tease the eye with muscular gestures and impertinent drips. But the trouble with chance is that sometimes you hit, sometimes you miss.

While the sensuality of the paint application may lure a viewer in, the composition often feels simply haphazard. There are more than two dozen works in the show, and many look like they might be details of some larger, more ambitious painting, and if only the whole thing were on view, we'd be wowed. As it is, many of the paintings just blur together in a mass of juicy brush strokes. Perrott strains toward sensuality and expressive release within the strictures of an algorithm. It's a worthy challenge — and one he has met in the past



Jeff Perrott's "RW 114 (Odiris)" from his show "Vitavulnus," up at LaMontagne Gallery.

— but these paintings fall short. Krueger has been making weird colored-pencil drawings, evocative of the American West

and its iconography, for some time, populating them with odd figures in ambiguous narratives. In this show, at Steven Zevitas

Gallery, he leaves narrative behind and offers mostly landscapes. He adds watercolor and acrylic paint into the mix. The

mark-making in these acid-toned works can be obsessive, and the drawing style is neurotically detailed and faux-naive.



Michael Krueger's "Pipestone" (2012), colored pencil, watercolor, and acrylic paint, up at Steven Zevitas Gallery.



"Air Geisha" by Marka27, who curated "Fear No Art 4" at Fourth Wall Project.

The paint surrounds all that agitation with eerie vapor.

This is not your grandfather's American West, like the noble and idyllic landscapes of Albert Bierstadt. These paintings are at the other end of the spectrum. In works such as "Pipestone," in which the top of a scored and pitted plateau rises beneath a sickly orange haze, Krueger gives us a hung-over West with an anxiety disorder.

The works are nervy and well executed, yet the pervasive sense of malady folds in on itself. In "Fluorescent Falls," Krueger fills the large sheet with burbling, striated waterfalls in a glaring, unnatural blue-green. In earlier drawings, the figures acted as stand-ins for the viewer, entry points into Krueger's world,

which has the psychedelic quality of a bad trip. There's no anchor in these works, no place to come to rest that sets up tension and contrast with the miasma he depicts.

His video animation "DMT TOO" is somewhat more effective. It's a simple work, with drawings rotating and morphing one into the next. The edgy quality remains in the heated tones, and some of the drawings have been jaggedly torn and collaged back together, but there's also a sense of wonder in some of the starry, patterned designs that buoys an otherwise desperately dark exhibit.

Fine art, street art, gutsy art

The artists in "Fear No Art 4," a celebration of street art and pop culture at Fourth Wall Project, are not weighed down by art history. Their work springs from other aesthetics: design, graphic art, comic books and cartoons, graffiti. Some of the work here is cheesy. The language of manga and superhero comics, which often over-idealize masculinity and femininity, needs to be skewered and examined, not simply mimicked.

Still, there's a lot of gutsy art here. Street artist Marka27, who curated the show, includes several of his own totemic mixed-media paintings, made with deconstructed sneakers. "Air Geisha" is a cool-eyed, compact yet ornate figure with a fancy head-

JEFF PERROTT: Vitavulnus
At: LaMontagne Gallery, 555 East Second St., South Boston, through Dec. 12. 617-464-4640, www.lamontagnegallery.com

MICHAEL KRUEGER: Fluorescent West: Drawings & Animation
At: Steven Zevitas Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave., through Dec. 8. 617-778-5265, www.stevenzevitasgallery.com

FEAR NO ART 4: Contemporary Pop & Street Culture
At: Fourth Wall Project, 132 Brookline Ave., through Dec. 3. (no phone), www.fourthwallproject.com

dress festooned with shoelaces; the Nike swoosh comes out of her ears, and white leather uppers form her elaborate costume. Don Rinx, an illustrator, muralist, and graphic artist, uses bold line and intricate, maze-like design in "Escalera En Mi Cabeza," depicting a man's head built out of architecture, which spirals upward in towers, ladders, and stone walls.

Two locals who have long effectively straddled fine art and street art have paintings hanging side by side. Raúl Gonzalez III applies a Looney Tunes style to exploring his Mexican heritage. In the startling "Vibora Si, Vibora No," a depiction of a rattlesnake coils up the page. It wears the mask of a boy, and its forked tongue pops through the open mouth. Caleb Neelon's two terrific works, "The Narcissism of Small Differences" and "We Get Stuck in the Forms That Liberate Us" use warm, fluid colors and a quirky cartoon line to humorously explore conundrums of the human condition.

There's no firm line anymore between the street and the gallery — fine artists have been borrowing from popular and urban culture for a long time. Still, "Fear No Art 4" is a breath of fresh air.

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