

successful, often treading too close to mere prettiness and sentimentality. Such works as *True Love* (2009) and *Kindly*



Robert Swedroe, *Paragon in Blue*, 2008, mixed media, 60" x 60". Contessa.

Thoughts (2009) packed images of butterflies and flowers amid details culled from paintings by Renoir and Botticelli. With the addition of love poetry, this sweet visual salad took on a saccharine note.

The "Cyber Series" collages, on the other hand, could be invigorating in a hallucinatory, obsessive way. Among the show's standouts was *Starry Nights* (2009), built of jar lids decorated with concentric rings of color, gleaming like starbursts atop a swirling, luminous wall-paper pattern dominated by violet. Though it bears no direct resemblance to the landscape by van Gogh, Swedroe's large construction somehow has the same mesmerizing aura.

Swedroe showed his collages for a few years in the '60s, but he focused on architecture for the next four decades. Since returning to this intimate medium, about five years ago, he has infused his work with gusto and good-natured energy. —Steven Litt

UP NOW

Yoshihiko Ueda

TAI Gallery/Textile Arts
Santa Fe
Through July 1

To the immediate west of Seattle lies the Quinault Rain Forest, where an annual precipitation of nearly 400 inches allows the trees to grow to immense size, creat-

ing a canopy that extends hundreds of feet above the forest floor. The illumination that filters down through the dense foliage imbues the place with an otherworldly quality.

While visiting the Quinault Forest in the summer of 1990, Yoshihiko Ueda, then established as a fashion photographer, had a "moment of vision" and decided to photograph the forest, eventually returning with an 8-by-10-inch camera and color film. Ueda's captivating photographs employ an eye-level vantage point and convey what it's like to wander through the dim forest, pause to take in a fallen tree covered with moss, or simply stand amid the undergrowth.

Quinault, No. 1 (1990–91) is infused with a sensation that borders on the audible—it seems the hum of cicadas and the occasional bird chirrup will soon break the silence of the image. *Quinault, No. 14* (1990–91)



Yoshihiko Ueda, *Quinault, No. 31*, 1990–91, archival C-print, 38¾" x 50". TAI Gallery/Textile Arts.

depicts a colossal tree, covered with moss of the finest filigree, with a patch of gemlike clover at its base. These images display the attentiveness of a skilled portraitist.

The larger prints—there are eight here measuring about 40 by 50 inches each—have the weight and presence to convey the atmosphere of the forest and the massive scale of the trees. Ueda has printed the works to emphasize the cerulean quality of the light and the impenetrable shadows. The result beckons the viewer to venture into the deep reaches of the forest. —Darius Himes

Nicole Charbonnet

Ralls Collection
Washington, D.C.

Nicole Charbonnet's 20 recent paintings in this show, "*American Beauty*," mapped the distance between childhood and adult concerns in densely layered imagery that conveyed both the durability and the fragility of our idols. Fragmentation is the artist's primary tool, whether her inspiration comes from comic-book pictures of cowboys and superheroes or paintings by such contemporary artists as Pat Steir, Louise Bourgeois, and Bridget Riley.

Charbonnet begins each canvas by building up a subtle, ghostly background in muted layers, where sheets of notebook paper, elementary-school exercises, children's safety diagrams, and cartoons of animals are collaged together and submerged under a translucent white surface. On top of this, Charbonnet depicts a large figurative or abstract subject in

bold color. Regardless of the image's source, the artist erases and interrupts lines and breaks up planes of color with smudges of matte white.

The abstract works, such as *Erased Riley* (2006–8) and *Ocean (Erased Bourgeois)*, 2008–9, initially seem unrelated to the depictions of American comic-book characters, though they feature the same intensely layered subsurface full of textual and pictorial references to child-

hood. Yet these abstract works also explore the deconstruction of heroes, albeit Charbonnet's personal ones rather than those dictated by pop culture.

The artist's process was ultimately the most satisfying element in this show. Charbonnet's best works amalgamate all of their layers to create a relentless sense of disintegration. In *Kiss (to have to have not)*, 2010, the image of a couple locked in an embrace is almost lost among painterly smears of red, beige, and black, eliminating the hierarchy between the central image and the disjointed surface. In this piece, the



Nicole Charbonnet, *Kiss (to have to have not)*, 2010, mixed media on canvas, 48" x 48". Ralls Collection.

artist's various techniques merge to create a cohesive sense of dissolution.

—Cara Ober

Neil Anderson

Bridgette Mayer
Philadelphia

Hung close together in this small parlor-floor gallery space, Neil Anderson's new abstract oil paintings, similar in size and composition, offered the impression of looking at a forest in different seasons. The paintings, when viewed individually, were handsome and engaging, pulling the viewer into their depths, but they would have benefited from having more room between them.



Neil Anderson, *Summer of '09*, 2009, oil on linen, 76" x 50". Bridgette Mayer.

Nightlife (2008) and *Summer of '09* (2009), both vertical diptychs, were the standouts of the show. *Nightlife* is composed of pale lavender and dark violet fields interlaced with lines of pale green and gray and slivers of yellow ochre shaped like broken glass. Because of its color scheme, this work was an anomaly in the exhibition, suggestive less of a forest environment than of the dark peripheries of a basement jazz club pierced by the occasional beam of light. *Summer of '09* is reminiscent of a swamp drying up in the heat. You can almost hear the steady hum of insects.

Brice Marden's serpentine lines in space would be the obvious touchstone for these works, but Anderson's style also seems to hark back to that of certain midcentury painters. There are aspects of his paintings that make one think he admires Charles Burchfield—the light that comes through their complex, netlike compositions, for instance. They also share something with Arshile Gorky's blocky landscape paintings from his happy Virginia sojourn, as well as recall the bold geometry and colors of Stuart Davis.

It is easy to imagine an Anderson painting at mural scale, and these works look as though, if given the opportunity, they'd eagerly spread beyond their confines, like nature.

—Edith Newhall

Valerie Hammond

Walker Contemporary
Boston

Valerie Hammond's prints and sculptures are fertile swirls. Outstretched hands trail into tangled vines; forearms are claimed by thick growths of flowers. Hammond combines motifs from Tibetan Buddhism and Christian votive sculpture with elements recalling places and things from her rural California childhood, letting these bits and pieces ferment together in her abundant imagination.

The prints here were light and cerebral. The monochrome *Guirlande* (2007) shows a pair of hands, palms forward, that give way to roots and vines. Laid down in dark indigo on wax-covered paper, the image conjures a specter of

growth—unseen but relentless—that threatens to undermine its delicate contours and harmony. In *Glimmer* (2010), the artist blends graphite pencil, thread, and beads on a yellowed-paper surface in a fantastic arabesque that evokes a mythical beast.



Valerie Hammond, *Guirlande*, 2007, relief printed litho on handmade Kozo paper, 72" x 48". Walker Contemporary.

Hammond's sculptures, in wax, silk, and wire, are a bit more visceral, and in some cases alarming. In *Pensée* (2010), a pale pair of cupped human hands is incorporated into a robust rose blossom and displayed, half main course, half specimen, beneath a glass bell jar. It is unclear which life form generates the other. *Transition 2* (2009) shows two life-size human forearms seized in a violent floral outburst. Displayed on the front desk of the gallery, the sculpture almost seemed sprung from the film *Carrie*, or at least from one of the darker corners of Hammond's root cellar.

What distinguished all the works in this show was their surface—a uniform, vaguely opaque stratum of wax that freezes movement like a shutter click. While Hammond draws on myriad sources, her work is neither biology class nor art-history recital. In the end, she captures the vital force that works change on all things, be they animal, mineral, or chimera. —Ken Shulman