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Pious conversions, dazzling domesticity, and ghosts made tangible

By Cate McQuaid | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 10, 2016

Home is where the art is

Painter Eric Stefanski has curated his first show, “Interiors,” at Dorchester Art Project, in which the paradigms of contemporary art dance with the intimacies of domestic life. It’s crackerjack.

Michelle Grabner’s painting “Untitled (Yellow Gingham)” has more zing than an espresso. This modernist grid looks like your grandma’s tablecloth, and at the junctures the yellow doubles in intensity, setting off a throbbing beat. Also from the kitchen, Allison Reimus paints and collages on dishcloth linen. Her spooky red abstraction/still life “Paint Pitcher 2” has a feverish glow, a ghostly grid, and circular cutouts bobbing along the bottom.

It’s a squirmy piece, half domestic still life, half nightmare, as is Angelina Gualdoni’s “The Lie of Balance,” a juicy green painting of a painting. It upends spatial logic: a table made of flat pattern; a tabletop that lifts into the neck of the subject of the portrait within the painting. You don’t quite know where to sit or stand in Gualdoni’s world; you might end up flattened yourself.

Sean Downey crafts sculptures as sly and oblique as his paintings, which reflect on American history and masculinity. For “MARSinstallation,” he lines a wall with roofing shingles, which hover over a cutout camouflage pattern of a hilly landscape. Atop the wall, ceramics painted with totems. Got that? Off-kilter DIY meets landscape painting meets iconography. Downey shuffles a head-spinning number of tropes, finding friction and humor in the juxtapositions.

The prize for the most naked, discomforting work goes to Maura O’Donnell’s video “Angel of the House.” In it, the artist (who is Stefanski’s wife) engages with domestic objects — a door, a chair, a sofa — in ways that, in another context, would be viewed as athletic. Here, as she pants and contorts, there’s a sexual cast, and a performance artist’s battle with endurance.

Life at home can be mundane, intensely personal, or fraught. Stefanski suggests that one way to make sense of it is through art.