

## At SooVAC, talent that needs no title

SooVAC gallery in Minneapolis samples a pool of youthful artists in a new "Untitled" show.

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**Mary Abbe** In the dozen years since it opened in a Lyndale Avenue storefront, Soo Visual Arts Center has survived the Great Recession, the sudden death last year of its founder, Suzy Greenberg, and the art world's fickle winds of taste and style.

Throughout it all, the spunky little gallery has expanded, contracted and sometimes partnered with other nonprofit organizations — most notably Minneapolis College of Art and Design, whose MFA exhibits it once presented, and Highpoint Center for Printmaking, which rented space from SooVAC before decamping for a building of its own.

That it has managed all this with 1½ staff people and a volunteer board of directors is no small accomplishment in a tough economy.

SooVAC has always welcomed new ideas, as it does in "Untitled 10," its 10th annual juried show, which features 25 artists picked from more than 220 applicants by Heid E. Erdrich, a poet and consultant specializing in American Indian art, and Jennifer Phelps, director of Burnet Gallery in downtown Minneapolis.

Their choices — 49 mostly smallish paintings, prints and photos — were somewhat constrained by the fact that the gallery now occupies only a tiny portion of its building. (It also has a pop-up holiday shop at 3506 Nicollet Av. S.)

### Mountains and majesty

Even so, the show is gracefully installed and there is some impressive big stuff.

The "Matterhorn," a landscape mural cleverly cut from wallpaper, dominates the front alcove. Starting with a generic photo of an alpine lake surrounded by spiky peaks, artist Alyssa Baguss carefully cut out little chunks of the mountains, removing fissures and facets of their topography while leaving a lacy lattice of imagery that accentuates the geography. Baguss compares the technique to computer-generated "fractal meshes." The result is an intriguing matrix that is far more interesting than its mundane origin would suggest.

Miranda Brandon's photos of dead birds — a bunting and a warbler — also pack a majestic wallop. In images about 4 feet wide, she shows the birds splattered onto invisible walls as if they'd just flown breast-first into a window with head tossed back, wings splayed, feet trailing. Their mirror-image shadows look like ghosts. Killed by chance encounters with invisible architecture, the birds are hauntingly posed and touchingly beautiful.

Kevin Beaudin deserves a shout-out for the handsome, hand-carved frames around his brooding paintings of a raven amid jacks-in-the-pulpit and an alarmed frog leaping futilely after an insect absconding with a tadpole. The frames are garnished with his stunningly realistic carvings of life-size ravens and 6-inch insects.

### Humans and nature

While "Untitled" is not a themed show, it includes a lot of human encounters with nature.



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Alyssa Baguss' "Matterhorn," a landscape mural cut from wallpaper, dominates the front alcove in the "Untitled 10" exhibit at Soo Visual Arts

Some are as straightforward as Amy Rice's painting "Garden Gifts," centered on a bouquet of flowers with petals collaged from old love letters, and "Caught," featuring a girl clutching a dog. Rice's pastel hues and children's-book style imbue the images with sophisticated sincerity.

In "Out of Africa," Jaime Johnson uses tea stains to lend a poetic patina to a cyanotype of a woman partly hidden by a palm frond. With sure and delicate lines, Paula Barkmeier depicts a fanciful "Turtle-Owl Woman" whose transparent wings and owl eyes enhance her lithe humanity.

Surrealism infuses Aimee Howard's little bronze sculptures "Confused Heart," which holds an east-pointing compass, and "Wrecked Heart," a hinged organ through which runs a tiny train track and four derailed cars, each about an inch long. Edie Overturf's woodcut prints are similarly unsettling with their images of meat-eating plants, flaming buildings and floods.

Other notable pieces include Adrian Armstrong's intensely observed lithograph "Jose Cuervo," a close-up portrait of the subject's head with the surrounding room reflected in his glasses; Susan Hensel's pastel "Cow-Hearted Woman," which features a Picasso-esque head and heart, and three large gouache still lifes of jewels, toys and housewares by Ashley Allen Short.

Two memorable drawings hint at deeply personal stories: Donna Dralle's "Portrait of My Father," which depicts a prosthetic leg and the businessman's shoes that shod its foot; and Marie Gardeski's "Hello, Mother," a tiny sketch of a child holding a doll-like head. The latter's resemblance to the child suggests the ventriloquism of youth, when — through toys and imaginary friends — kids teach themselves to mimic, mock and absorb the language, expressions and lives of their elders.

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