

LIFE & ARTS

On Exhibit: Identities built through collages at Union College's Mandeville Gallery in Schenectady

"EMBODY" is inspired by Wangechi Mutu, a Kenyan-born artist

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Image: "The Sun, The Moon, and The Truth," 2018, installation by Amir H. Fallah.

PHOTOGRAPHER: INDIANA NASH/GAZETTE REPORTER

Identities and ideologies are subversively combined and collaged in the latest exhibition to open at Union College's Mandeville Gallery.

“EMBODY,” features work from 10 contemporary diasporic artists who use everything from fabric to paint and paper to create portraits and figurative representations that blend influences and cultures and defy stereotypes.

One of the first works in the show is a sweeping installation by Amir H. Fallah. An entire wall is covered in a deep purple-colored paint, with a diamond-shaped canvas at the center. Called “The Sun, The Moon and The Truth,” it features a figure whose head and torso are covered in a blue and yellow patterned cloth. The figure’s neon orange-colored hands are pressed together as if in prayer while a few odd objects like various colored eyeballs, a succulent plant and a wooden duck perch in the foreground.

Fallah, a native of Iran, uses his work to explore people’s identities through their interactions with objects. In Fallah’s other two works within the show, along with the previously mentioned installation, he braids together both Western and Middle Eastern references and objects.

Not too far away, another stunning installation jumps out at viewers. “Somewhere In Between,” mixes historical references and motifs through found objects, oil, ink, flocking paper and fabric. It’s a portrait of intense proportions, with a head collaged out of paper with the top of a round accent table. Below that, a figure’s body is made up of a velvet-like material with white-colored outlines detailing a hand and arm. The hand holds a book, the fingers keeping the figure’s place.

The body of the figure looks like it could be from hundreds of years ago, while the head echoes more modern motifs.

Created by New York City-based David Shrobe, the piece “renegotiates history,” as the label copy notes.

That’s one of the leading ideas or touchstones of the exhibition, curated by Julie Lohnes, the director and curator of art collections and exhibitions at Union College.

“EMBODY” is inspired by Wangechi Mutu, a Kenyan-born artist who used figurative mixed media collage as a way of rebelling against the ways that people can be acculturated and controlled. While the exhibition doesn’t include Mutu’s work, it features works all within that same spirit.

That includes the afrofuturistic works by Stacey Robinson. His work may be familiar to some, as he exhibited on campus not too long ago. In this exhibition, he brings more figure-focused works like “The Harbinger,” a layered piece focused someone looking out from futuristic pink-tinted goggles, with gold wings behind them, and a spaceship peeping out from behind.

Close by, artist Saya Woolfalk, is also inspired by science fiction, just in a different way. Woolfalk’s works stem from an imagined race of women called “The Empathics,” who can alter their genetic makeup and fuse together with plants.

In “Encyclopedia of Cloud Divination (Plate 3),” a woman with vine-like lines swirling around her body stands on a floral pedestal. Two colorful and planet-like orbs float above her hands and one larger orb floats just above her head.

Though the piece is brightly colored, with pastels and some more saturated hues, it's also ominous, raising more questions than it answers and leading the viewers to want to see the rest of the "Encyclopedia of Cloud Division" series.

Toward the end of the exhibition (or the beginning depending on which way one goes), are installations by aricoco/ari tabei.

Layers of mismatched fabrics and faux-furs are piled on top of one another in "Dress for Today #7, The Human in the Ant's Skin." Aricoco, a Tokyo native, explores non-hierarchical systems through her work, in this case looking at the social system of ants. The artist will perform at the exhibition's opening reception on Tuesday, Sept. 24, from 5-6:30 p.m.

"EMBODY" is a vibrant exhibition that requires at least one visit, if not more. It will be up through January 2020 at the Mandeville Gallery. There will also be an artist's talk from 5-6:30 p.m. by Simonette Quamina on Tuesday, Oct. 8. The Mandeville Gallery, located on the second floor of the Nott Memorial, is open daily from 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. For more info visit muse.union.edu.