

BEST OF 2013: ART

A DYNAMIC, COMPLICATED YEAR

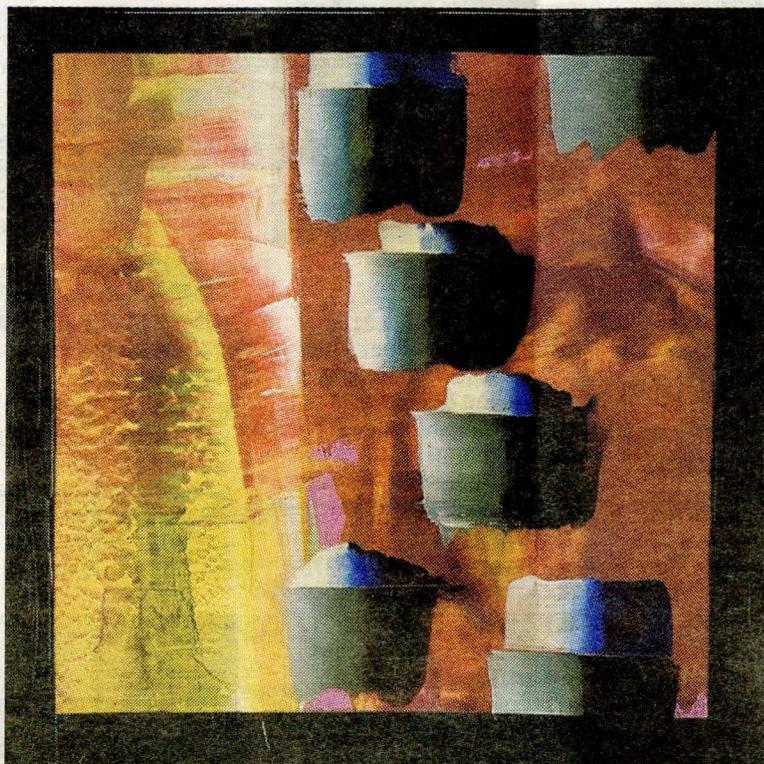
By **Fredric Koeppel**
Special to The Commercial Appeal

They come at the end of every year, the lists of the best of this and that. My duty and pleasure are to offer the best art exhibitions of 2013, from a local art culture that is increasingly dynamic and complicated. No hierarchy of better and best and totally best; the order is chronological through the year.

“Present Tense: The Art of Memphis from 2001-Now,” at Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Feb. 3 to April 14: This unprecedented and massive survey of local art was ambitious and controversial and was perhaps more notable for the conversation it started about inclusion and exclusion and the alternative show it spawned — “Hanging Particples” — than for the work it presented. Still, it contained a great deal of wonderful and essential art. We hope the Dixon mounts a similar effort in 2023.

“The Sorrows of War,” at Memphis College of Art, Feb. 15 to March 24: Jennifer Sargent curated this profoundly beautiful, technically accomplished and morally disturbing exhibition that presented war and its aftermath as a mingling of past and present in an unfortunate and seemingly insurmountable cycle.

Terri Phillips, “Chapel of Yes,” at Tops Gallery, June 28 to July 14: In this basement gallery, Phillips created a spare, refined sanctuary where questions



COURTESY OF THE DIXON GALLERY & GARDENS

Jay Etkin, “Primal” series, oil alkyd, oil bar and wax on wood panel, 2009, are a part of the exhibition “Present Tense: The Art of Memphis from 2001-Now” shown at the Dixon Gallery & Gardens from February to April.

about art, death, love and time merged with our deepest yearnings to understand ourselves and others and our relationship with nature and the universe — and perhaps the first use of a live catfish in a local art installation.

“Material Anthology,” at Crosstown Arts, July 12 to Aug. 11: Distilled from the 103 exhibitions at Hamlett Dobbins’ minuscule (and now defunct) Material gallery, founded in 2004, “Material Anthology” presented a joyful and exhilarating gathering of one work each by 72 artists that didn’t miss a note in quality, diversity and appeal.

Chloe York, “Decorators,” at Memphis College of Art, Aug. 19 to Sept. 27: A superbly

gifted painter, York explored in this baroque series themes of beauty, bodily decoration and the clichés of femininity, yet through the very act of painting imbued her work with a maelstrom of attractive and seductive powers.

Tom Lee, “Sheer Delight,” at Clough-Hanson Gallery, Rhodes College, Sept. 6 to Oct. 12: Using the simplest of materials — diaphanous curtains, wood columns turned on a lathe, large cut-paper doilies — the well-known local sculptor created an environment that delicately turned notions of innocence, childlike wonder, myth and transparency into agents of ambiguity.

Jeri Ledbetter, “Ricordando,” at L Ross Gallery, Sept. 6 to 30:



“Material Anthology” was at Crosstown Arts



MEMPHIS BROOKS MUSEUM OF ART

Maysey Craddock, American (b. 1971) *Night Memory*, 2007
Gouache and thread on found paper.

For the best show of her career, this longtime abstract painter deployed her muted palette and her panoply of gestures and technical prowess in a series of layered Arctic planes that plumbed depths of history, memory and nostalgia.

“A Different Landscape: Maysey Craddock and Erin Harmon,” at Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, April 17 to Nov. 10: The inspired decision to pair

these immensely talented and intuitive artists resulted in an exhibition of rare and evocative beauty, mystery and vague disturbance, dark carnivals of harmony and imbalance.

“Shared Vision: The Sondra Gilman and Celso Gonzalez-Falla Collection of Photography,” at Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, through Jan. 5: Visitors to the Brooks still have slightly more than a week to see the most important exhibition of 20th century photography ever to appear in this city. The more than 150 iconic images arrest the attention, feed the imagination and generally knock your socks off.

“Bauhaus twenty-21: An Ongoing Legacy,” at the Art Museum of the University of Memphis, through Jan. 4: This elegant exhibition features photographs by Gordon Watkinson that compare buildings from the original and seminal Bauhaus movement of modern architecture with contemporary structures influenced by them. The show includes intricate models made by students in U of M’s architecture program.

UNCOMMON BEAUTY

Local artists expand the limits of landscape painting

By Fredric Koeppl
Special to The Commercial Appeal

Let's forgo the usual commentary about beauty and what is beauty and does beauty exist and if it does who cares and did the 20th century kill beauty and can ugly things be beautiful and just say that "A Different Kind of Landscape: Maysey Craddock and Erin Harmon" at Memphis Brooks Museum of Art is an exhibition of rare beauty.

That evaluation applies both to the work by these well-known local artists and to the arrangement and hanging of the show, organized by the museum's chief curator and curator of American, modern and contemporary art, Marina Pacini.

The exhibition title is apt. Neither Craddock nor Harmon has the least interest in broad fields, hazy mountains, towering forests, seething rivers or flaring sunsets. The landscapes they create, in varying forms of intricate mixed media techniques, reflect emotional and psychological reactions to the external world, reaching from the summit of transcendence to the depths of the unconscious, mythic, witchy, mysterious.

In an interview with The Commercial Appeal in 2005, Harmon spoke of "balancing interior and exterior space," a concept that still applies to her now very different work, and to Craddock's as well.

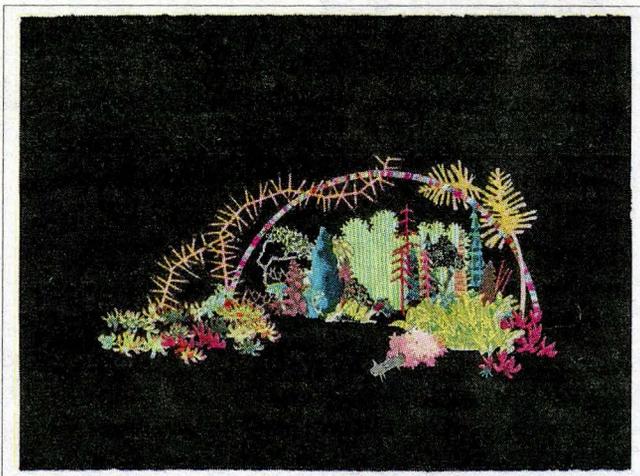
Thematically and technically, Craddock has produced a consistent body of work. Her "canvas" typically consists of found paper bags that she flattens and sews together; the medium is gouache, a form of watercolor that's thicker and a little chalky.

Profoundly affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Craddock produced paintings dense with foreboding, disaster and ruin, formulating skeletal remains of shattered buildings and trees and bridges.

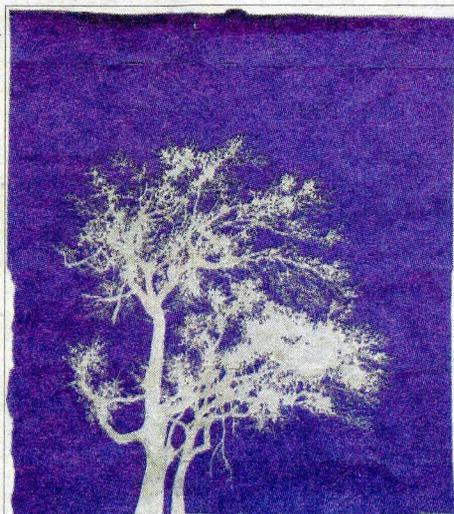
Craddock still treads along the edges of this motif but with growing maturity, insight and detachment, offering a more generalized view of the human

"A DIFFERENT KIND OF LANDSCAPE"

Works by Maysey Craddock and Erin Harmon, at Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, 1934 Poplar in Overton Park, through Nov. 10. Call 901-544-6200 or visit brooksmuseum.org.



ABOVE: Erin Harmon, "Post-Historic Landscape," gouache on paper collage with flocking, 2013.



LEFT: Maysey Craddock, "Night Memory," gouache and thread on found paper, 2007.

dangerous aspic."

Harmon's *métier* in those days was excess; now it's painstaking intricacy and reticence, though with no less concentration on the paradoxical marriage of gaiety and the sinister. These are dark carnivals, disturbing bouquets.

There's something of magical about Harmon's method in these works of gouache and collage, and also something — if I may be forgiven an old-fashioned reference — feminine, in the sense of the delicacy and dedication with which, for example, my grandmother painted floral designs on a pot and the fragile little cups of a hot chocolate set at the turn of the preceding century.

My grandmother, however, would not have brought a strange and colorful sentience to a "Post-Historic Landscape" or "Land of Lost and Found," the first on a black background, the second on white, each projecting the feeling of an out-of-focus fairy tale.

Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but mostly the truly beautiful partakes of elements not only harmonious but novel, idiosyncratic, remote. Those aspects elevate the work of Craddock and Harmon to a higher level of singular, uncanny elegance.