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From drawings to video portraits

Whitespace, Marcia Wood offer a mix of works, artists.

By **Catherine Fox**
For the AJC

Sarah Emerson's paintings are dense compositions in confectionery colors. Jeff Grant's sculptures and drawings are crisp and minimal.

Yet, their work at Whitespace gallery ends up in a similar place: the world gone awry.

Emerson's landscapes are at once Edenic and disturbing. The Atlanta artist clothes careful descriptions of flowers and fauns in the sugary sweetness of Disney cartoons and the obvious artifice of paint by numbers. She drives her point home by seeding them rhinestones, the epitome of ersatz.

Distortions of scale and strange perspectives add

Gallery reviews

Sarah Emerson, Jeff Grant.
Through Oct. 10. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesdays-Saturdays. Whitespace, 814 Edgewood Ave. 404-688-1892. www.whitespace814.com

Duncan Johnson, Neil Fried and Monica Duncan.

Through Oct. 17. 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Marcia Wood Gallery, 263 Walker St. 404-827-0030. www.marcia.woodgallery.com
The Bottom Line: Two galleries, five artists, all worth seeing.

to the discombobulation. "Swarm," the most overtly creepy piece, gives the viewer the feeling of lying on the ground nose-to-nose with a mash-up of giant locusts. A biblical plague, all pretty in pink.



Duncan Johnson's reclaimed wood, graphite and nails piece "Waterline, 2009" is among his works on display at Marcia Wood Gallery.

Emerson begins her show with a series of charcoal portraits of women killed off in horror films. The last piece, "Soft Trap," is a paradisiacal view of nubile women cavorting by a waterfall. A happy ending? Well, what about the title? Emerson leaves you

hanging.

Intentionally.

Grant fuses elegance and dread in his wall and floor pieces. My favorite is a sculpture titled "Withershins," which means "in the direction that is contrary to the natural course." A bulb in a metal shade dangles from the ceiling on a long cord so that it hovers inches from the floor. The concentrated light seeps beyond the rim, eerily, like a UFO. It illuminates barely visible miniature animal figures beneath it, whom the light fixture is, or so it seems, about to squash.

Duncan Johnson is best known for intricate, meticulously crafted sculptures using scavenged wood. In the past couple of years, he has shifted to a two-dimensional format, constructing "paintings" using the same wood milled into thin strips of various widths and lengths.

It's been a seamless seg-

ue, to judge from the handsome geometric abstractions at Marcia Wood Gallery. The paintings bear the same reverence for his materials and the precision crafting. Even the wire brads that affix the strips to the backing panels become part of the composition.

Johnson reveals his talents as a colorist in his adroit use of the paint, texture and patina of the wood strips. The suggestion of past life in these faded colors and scraped surfaces brings a vague poignancy to the work. If there's a subtext, however, it's the poetry of the well-made object.

Also at Marcia Wood, "Palimpsest Portraits" is a peek at an intriguing work in progress by Atlantans Neil Fried and Monica Duncan. The artists envision a tableau of architectural objects and interactive video that sounds like a new media sort of "Our Town."

They have begun by

working with other artists to create the characters, presented in mini-portraits composed of video and voiceover. The artists use software they've developed that allows them to manipulate footage shot at different times. Two pieces in which multiple portraits are melded together are also on view.

The portraits succeed to various degree, but the concept of the virtual community is promising. The hallucinatory effects created by the software are striking and symbolically apt: The way the artists layer present over past, showing the process of erasure and traces that remain, is the perfect visual analogy for a palimpsest. I'm looking forward to the end result.

Catherine Fox blogs about art and architecture on www.ArtscriticATL.com.