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GALLERIES

Airy heights to watery depths

By Cate McQuaid GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 15, 2016



Julia Von Metzsch Ramos's oil-on-panel "Shark's Mouth in Winter" (left) and Cheryl Ann Thomas's porcelain "Curl" (top right) are at Gallery NAGA. Katharina Chapuis's oil-on-canvas "Untitled (189)" is at Alpha Gallery.

Cheryl Ann Thomas's big, crumpling, airy, light-on-their-feet ceramics on view at Gallery NAGA spring from a long, arduous process. First, she builds a large vessel, 3 or 4 feet high, by laying one spaghetti-thin strand of porcelain clay over the next. She makes it top-heavy, so that when she fires it, the vessel slumps. She'll fashion two or three of these, then fit one on top of the next like puzzle pieces, and put the whole thing in the kiln to fix it.

From a distance, her works look like piles of laundry or stacks of old linen baskets, but up close, they're almost animate, as they scrunch, stretch, and twist, inviting you to peer in and through. In "Curl," one pale green-gray form snakes between two coal-gray ones, a thread of blue activating their rippling surfaces. It looks as if it's about to take flight.

Weather is a magical aura in Julia Von Metzsch Ramos's paintings, also at NAGA. This young painter continues to experiment, using seascapes as a foundation, and occasionally, in her push toward the fantastical, she falls flat. "Steaming Ocean" looks unconvincingly surrounded by white flame.

But in "Shark's Mouth in Winter," she makes clever use of an absorbent ground. The blues and turquoises of the luscious, silken water seep into the canvas, while the spiky, dotty froth of a wave hitting rock sits on top. We expect to experience space in a landscape in the tried-and-true way, across the horizon line, but Von Metzsch Ramos pings us from depth to surface here, there, and everywhere, and appears to be having great fun doing it.