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SCENE

‘Like solving a puzzle’

Heather Kelly pieces together new realities in collage exhibit



“The Way Things Used to Be,” by Heather Kelly

Collage, particularly photomontage—the art of clipping out and combining diverse images to create a new one—uses juxtaposition to illustrate a relationship that didn’t exist before. Hence its popularity among practitioners of Dada, surrealism and pop art. Local artist Heather Kelly, in her new exhibition, *Delectable Cannibal*, now showing at the Blackbird bookstore/cafe, demonstrates the technique in 34 pieces that range from engagingly whimsical to deliberately disturbing.

by
Carey Wilson

Review:
Delectable Cannibal, collage art by Heather Kelly, shows through July 31.

Blackbird
1431 Park Ave.
facebook.com/blackbirdchico

As she explained via email, “Much of my collage is influenced by my fascination with the point at which pleasure and enjoyment overlaps with disgust and aversion—for example the universal impulse to catch a glimpse of the scene of a car accident. I’m drawn to what simultaneously attracts and repulses us.”

Primarily using found photos from old magazines and archives, a photocopier, an X-Acto knife and rubber cement, Kelly composes images, such as “Garden of Earthly Delights.” The 11-by-14-inch black-

and-white piece invites the viewer to contemplate the relationship between a sky full of capering cherubs dancing over the image of a man kneeling in front of a magazine rack. Beside him, three wolves dine on something unseen next to a gracefully ascending staircase blocked by a giant set of chain links. The plethora of associations woven into the composition can be as complex as the viewer chooses to make it.

Simpler in outward appearance, but just as rich in contemplative associations, “Vestibular Sense” shows a hand-drawn furrowed forehead floating in white space with worried-looking eyes, eyebrows assaulted by black, lightning-bolt-like arrows. Suspended above this is a four-panel composition of the lunar landscape, fanned out like cards across the top of the picture.

On the “lighter” side, the 8-by-10-inch “Hellrider” superimposes a cartoonishly skull-headed motorcycle rider in a dominant position over a photo of a motorcycle racer who is riding out of the frame at the bottom of the picture. And for those whose tastes tend more toward the meditative than the macabre, “Beg” depicts an outreached hand over a curvaceous “landscape” of satiny material, above which floats the grainy “planet” that could be the moon or a glimpse through the aperture of a microscope or a telescope.

More down-to-Earth ambig-

uity and a bit of humor are manifest in the partially color photo-based “Manipulator,” in which a man wearing a cardigan vest appears to suspend a smiling young woman in a yellow dress over the symmetrical web of a spider. Beneath them a crinkled and cratered moonscape fills out the frame.

Delectable Cannibal offers far too much imagery and imagination to be described succinctly in print. Better to visit the welcoming Blackbird house and explore and contemplate for yourself.

At the show’s reception on Saturday (July 20), the atmosphere—which featured DJ Sprech Magic (aka local musician/concert promoter Jake Sprecher) providing a low-volume mostly punk-rock soundtrack—the atmosphere was that of a youthful salon: social and fun.

The following morning, when I returned to look at the show over coffee, the friendly coziness of a bookstore prevailed. As I wandered around, looking at the selection of books and the art on the walls, I was reminded of something that Kelly said about her art: “It’s a bit like solving a puzzle; sometimes the right elements come together quickly and others I connect over a long period of time.” Turns out her approach to creating art is perfectly suited to how one might approach appreciating it as well. □