

Museums

In the galleries: Three artists become one

By Mark Jenkins

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Alattar, Johnson and Reed

Abstraction arises from many impulses, as three current shows illustrate. Lina Alattar's soft-edged paintings evoke mood and personal history. Carol Reed's mixed-media works are studies in contrast, of texture as well as form and color. Erick Johnson's paintings are derived from photographs, but those origins vanish during a rigorous distillation process.

The misty canvases in Alattar's "Embracing Abstraction," at Hillyer Art Space, employ pastel colors and splashes of brighter hues, frequently off to one side. But the dominant shade is often gray, layered over the others. This could signify a world enshrouded in clouds or smoke, but the Fairfax-based artist writes that her concerns include "rootlessness." Perhaps that's why her pictures seem to be snapshots of visual improvisations that could go any which way.

Reed's "not just black or white," at Susan Calloway Fine Arts, does include much black, whether in bold forms, spindly lines or patterns derived from paisley, brocade or herringbone. The local artist uses paint, ink, charcoal and pencil, as well as collage, to build compositions that have solid central motifs but also much that's wispy and impromptu. The show's title refers to color accents in such luxurious colors as gold, crimson and turquoise, which evoke jewelry and ceramics.

The title of Johnson's "Streets for Evermore" is from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" but also is a reference to the New Yorker's method. The paintings at Gallery Neptune & Brown are inspired by his semi-abstract sidewalk photos, which are simplified to charcoal drawings and gouache paintings. The final step produces oils of neatly arrayed color blocks, which are sanded to reveal substrata and produce streaks that suggest motion (as do titles such as "Thataway" and "Double Back"). If Johnson's work is no more representational than Alattar's or Reed's, his zooming rectangles possess an energy that seems specifically urban.

Lina Alattar: Embracing Abstraction On view through March 26 at Hillyer Art Space, 9 Hillyer Ct. NW. 202-338-0680. hillyerartspace.org.

Carol Reed: not just black or white On view through March 26 at Susan Calloway Fine Arts, 1643 Wisconsin Ave. NW. 202-965-4601. callowayart.com.

Erick Johnson: Streets for Evermore On view through March 26 at Gallery Neptune & Brown, 1530 14th St. NW. 202-986-1200. neptunefineart.com.