

TOP NEWS

MAP engages dialogue about contemporary art

Dan Collins, The Examiner

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BALTIMORE -

Life used to be simple. A map was this cumbersome paper explosion that had a Rubik's Cube quality when it came to folding it, designed by Rand McNally to show us how to get to where we weren't.

Nowadays, life's more complex.

There are concept maps and pixel maps, mind maps, knowledge maps and topic maps. Maps that help us learn, show us something new.

Maps that take each person to a different place.

It is this definition that distinguishes MAP, the Maryland Art Place, and its celebration of 20 years of delighting and confounding those who visit the center — a celebration called “MAPPING the Alternative,” a combination exhibition, catalogue and public forum engaging a dialogue about contemporary art.

Leading the way is Lilly Wei, MAP's 20th annual critic-in-residence and curator of the exhibition, which this year brings together the works of nine select artists and three writers who together, using ballpoint and brushstroke, have endeavored to make statements about nostalgia and the unknown, dirt, rage, violence, beauty and more, through a variety of mediums.

“Mostly when you are asked to curate, you pick the artists and write the catalogue, but this time, I was asked to mentor young writers, making it a much more collaborative experience — quite wonderful, quite intriguing,” Wei said.

When it came to selecting the artwork, “I looked for those that were more experimental, with a conceptual edge and a strong narrative ... of the nine artists, three are painters [Timothy App, Maggie Michael and Zachary Thornton], two others are photographers [Andrew Cook and Elizabeth Crisman], then a sculptor [Lesley McTague] and the rest [Jessie Lehson, Julia Kim Smith and Cory Wagner] are installation/mixed media artists,” she said.

Wei selected three writers, all recent graduates or still in school: Justin Gershwin with degrees in economics and art history; art historian Brooke Lampley and Lauren Pennell with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and experience in artistic production. This past autumn, the group visited the selected artists in their studios, to ask questions, examine their works and compare notes.

“I like the idea of other eyes looking critically at the work, and in particular, I liked the idea of peers looking at peers, since most of the artists are young, and young critics might be more empathetic,” she said.

That being said, what can a visitor to the show expect?

“It’s wonderful to support contemporary art. They need support for the furtherance of their work. Now the dead artist is a different kettle of fish, and they need to be supported also, but young artists should be encouraged. How much better to be making art than making bombs,” she said.

“In the end, you don’t really know what it is till you see it, and isn’t that the best thing about visual art? You’re surprised.”

If you go

» “MAPPING the Alternative” is now on display through June 24 with artists’ talks scheduled for June 7 and 21 at the Maryland Art Place, 8 Market Place, Baltimore. Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. There is no admission charge to enter the gallery or to take part in MAP’s regular programs and events. For more information, call 410-962-8565 or visit www.mdartplace.org.