

GALLERIES

At Project 4, a delicate show of flower power

BY JESSICA DAWSON

Laurel Lukaszewski's latest exhibition at Project 4 looks like two shows in one. The first is a meditation on the fleeting beauty of nature. The other, an ungainly ode to pasta.

The exhibition starts off right. Walk in and you're looking at hundreds of delicate porcelain cherry blossoms installed along the wall in gentle waves. Your eyes drift upward toward the gallery's second floor loft, where the blossoms sprout along the top floor. Called "Sakura," the piece embraces the space like gorgeous 3-D wallpaper. Spend time admiring the work's haute-couture-like intricacy: Blossoms fashioned from cream-colored porcelain are affixed, one by one, to the wall by means of delicate copper wire; the installation looks as if it took ages. Here, the orange blush of copper illuminates the channel between wall and flower, subtly warming an otherwise sepulchral palette.

Lukaszewski says that her piece consists of 3,020 blossoms — one for each of the cherry trees that Japan gave to the United States in 1912 (following a disastrous shipment of 2,000 insect-infested trees two years earlier). With that political gesture as her inspiration, Lukaszewski creates a literal monument to diplomacy. Her porcelain blossoms have the solemnity of a grave marker, yet their attention to detail suggests a deliberation bordering on optimism.

Walk deeper into the gallery and you'll encounter a curtain made from interlocking porcelain ribbons shaped — I hate to say it — like flat noodles. Though the work's construction intrigues (small segments interlock and hang from one another) the work nevertheless feels like a misplaced shower curtain.

The conceit Lukaszewski establishes with "Sakura" — art that surrounds us, rather than art parceled out as a discrete object — is disturbed by the self-conscious objectness of that curtain. Something similar happens out back, on the gallery's rear porch, where a pile of similarly shaped porcelain gathered in a corner feels too much like outside fettuccine awaiting sauce.

Follow the stairs to the second level and the rest of "Sakura" unfolds. Here, our eyes move up, down, around and



PETAL PUSHER: Porcelain cherry blossoms spread throughout the gallery in Laurel Lukaszewski's "Sakura."



OFFICE AESTHETIC: Anne Chan sees an architectural beauty in staples. Another of her sculptural works is made of business cards.

over the balcony to take a vertiginous look down toward the gallery entrance. Lukaszewski creates a visual path that our eyes can't help but chase, on and on and on.

Upstairs in a rear gallery, a snaking pile of porcelain leaves, each delicate and crinkly and fairly begging for our touch, suggests a requiem to nature and the passage of time. Called "Ghost," the work exudes a visceral deadness in its leaves. It proves the perfect pendant for "Sakura": Both

are silent and voluble at the same time.

Iacovone, Chan

Hamiltonian Gallery offers new work by two recipients of its modest fellowship program. Michael Dax Iacovone's video and photography document the action — and lack thereof — at Washington intersections using strategically placed mirrors to gain additional views. Some videos include

the artist, some do not. One monitors the gallery and its entrance door in real time.

In the video "14th and U: Four Times Around," Iacovone does just that: He purposefully makes the rounds of the intersection, hash-marking the sidewalk each time he reaches a corner. Watching it, a briefly pleasurable sense of the uncanny — gallery visitors probably would have passed the same intersection just minutes before — gives way to the realization that this a blandly executed exercise in . . . I'm not sure exactly what, though the artist claims kinship to the situationists, a 1960s Marxist art collective. At its worst, "14th and U: Four Times Around" could pass for satire of the art world's embrace of the nominal.

It is Anne Chan's prints and sculptures, riffing as they do on cubicle culture, that are worth the visit here. The artist offers several groovy, glossy close-ups of staples — yes, the ones

that fill the Swingline — blown up so large as to look architectural (one image mimics a colonnade; it takes a moment to register the outside scale). These pictures are clever, but we've seen their likes before.

Turn your eyes instead to Chan's sculpture "Collective," which sits on the ground like a playful riff on the macho abstract expressionist block. Instead of making the work out of steel, as abstract expressionists did once upon a time, Chan made hers out of discarded business cards.

The artist acquired her less-than-heroic materials from her colleagues — and former colleagues — at the Baltimore architecture firm RTKL. (Chan is the photography coordinator there.) The firm recently reshuffled its offices; some staff members were laid off. Chan crafted "Collective" from this cache of redundant cards, the castoffs of a downsized economy.

All those paper cards reduce Chan's big, formal gesture into a visual play on economic constriction. Her house of cards reminds us how deeply we identify with our jobs and how fleeting those identifications can be — especially in these times.

Chan's second sculpture — if we can call it that — waits behind a partition in the gallery's rear. Called "Assembly," it's a 14-foot-long, jewellike carpet of silver that sits on a small, raised platform. The piece isn't really a rug, but it looks a bit like one: Tiny clusters of staples, 12 or 14 or so each, stand every few inches in neat rows. There are tens of thousands of staples here, each dot glistening like silver buttons under the gallery lights. In many ways the opposite of "Collective," which uses the mundane to subvert heroic form, "Assembly" finds Chan turning the everyday into the sublime.

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LAUREL LUKASZEWSKI at Project 4, 1353 U St. NW, third floor, 202-232-4340, Wednesday-Saturday, noon-6 p.m., to Dec. 18. www.project4gallery.com

MICHAEL DAX IACOVONE AND ANNE CHAN at Hamiltonian Gallery, 1353 U St. NW, 202-332-1116, Tuesday-Saturday, noon-6 p.m., through Saturday. www.hamiltoniangallery.com

'Up' soars; 'Rum' has quite a kick; 'Fine' is very good, indeed

MOVIES FROM C1

act of insight and terrific imagination, director Jason Reitman has thrown most of the book out, keeping Bingham's character and inventing two more, a sexy fellow traveler named Alex (Vera Farmiga) and a young whippersnapper named Natalie (Anna Kendrick), whose ideas about teleconferencing threaten to do unto Ryan what he's been doing unto others all these years.

Reitman's previous movies, "Thank You for Smoking" and "Juno," were both assured, entertaining comedies, but with "Up in the Air" the 32-year-old director has taken an enormous leap forward, toggling between comedy and drama, romance and social observation, satire and sorrow with the aplomb of Chesley Sullenberger. With the feckless, charismatic Ryan at the film's center, Reitman could easily have made a perfectly absorbing topical "dramedy" or glib picaresque with the usual plot beats and payoffs.

Look closer, though, and you'll see that the most profound, subtle joys of "Up in the Air" are the ways Reitman continually subverts the established paradigms, first by having Clooney's character meet two girls, each of whom pushes wildly different buttons in him. Like Michael Clayton, Ryan Bingham handsomely embodies a certain kind of archetype of male loneliness — boy, is he not a swan. But the way Reitman confects for Ryan to confront his most cherished assumptions about happiness and meaning isn't through crisp narrative devices and false catharsis, but by dog-legging into what turn out to be "Up in the Air's" best sequences.

In one such scene, three characters engage in what must be the most amusingly, brutally honest conversation about men and women and life and expectations ever committed to film; later they take an unexpected, gently transforming cruise to nowhere that poetically captures how experience can turn on the thinnest of dimes. (The best such digression is a sequence set at a Midwestern wedding, which Reitman films and paces like a home movie.)

"Up in the Air" is all about connection



THE CINEMA GUILD

MAN ON THE MOVE: Robert De Niro as an isolated widower in "Everybody's Fine."



ABBOT GENSER/MIRAMAX

— literally, when Ryan rushes to make his flights, and figuratively, when he avoids the emotional version at all costs.

With as assured and perceptive a filmmaker as Reitman at the controls, and with Clooney and his co-stars so impeccably inhabiting their roles (Kendrick deserves special mention for her spot-on depiction of the drive and longing that propel her young character), it shouldn't come as a shock that the climax of "Up in the Air" comes as such a shock. But it does, and the fact that the audience cares so deeply at that particular point demonstrates why this isn't just a good but a great movie.

As if all of that — perfect casting, brilliant writing and flawless tonal control — weren't enough, Reitman's best, most audacious move turns out to be his choice to begin and end "Up in the Air" with interviews with the recently downsized, most of them real-life. These sequences give what could have been a pleasurable enough bagatelle a thoroughly unexpected air of gravitas and pathos.

"Up in the Air" is a timeless movie that's utterly of its time — a movie of humor, heart and mind.

In one of those cosmic cinematic felic-

ties, two other fine movies open today with connections at their core, both anchored by quietly compelling performances on the part of their lead actors.

The French actor Alex Descas is mesmerizing in "35 Shots of Rum," where he plays a metro conductor living with his grown daughter (the equally charismatic Mati Diop) in an apartment building outside of Paris. Descas had a role in Jim Jarmusch's "The Limits of Control," but here he proves an utterly transfusing leading man, as his character slowly, almost imperceptibly, begins to come to terms with the departure of his cherished only child.

In another filmmaker's hands, their close relationship would be the stuff of neurosis or pathology; here, director Claire Denis handles her characters with care and compassion, discreetly conveying the pain and exhilaration of letting go.

The connections Robert De Niro makes in "Everybody's Fine" happen to be earthbound — because his character has a heart condition, he can't fly, so instead of airports he's afoot in train stations and bus terminals. Still, his physical and emotional journey gently echoes Clooney's in

"Up in the Air," as his character, a retired widower named Frank, travels across the country to reunite with his grown children.

More than any other American actor, De Niro has made a study of the isolation and pride that define the alpha-male ego; here, as a working-class provider who suddenly fears he may not be needed, he brings a lifetime's worth of experience, vulnerability and nuance to a role that calls less for his still-explosive energy than for stillness.

Even in the first few minutes of "Everybody's Fine," which was directed by Kirk Jones and based on Giuseppe Tornatore's 1990 film of the same name, viewers know that De Niro is going to break their hearts: Just watch how Frank quizzes a supermarket clerk on the store's wine selection and prepare to crumple. By just tightening the line of his mouth, De Niro wordlessly conveys volumes about loss and regret and strength and inconsolable aloneness.

At one point, Frank contemplates a wheeled suitcase and infuses in that one moment the sweetness and vulnerability of E.T. See "Everybody's Fine," but one piece of advice: Phone home first.

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UP IN THE AIR

(109 minutes, at AMC Loews Georgetown) is rated R for profanity and some sexual content.

35 SHOTS OF RUM

(102 minutes, in French with subtitles, at Landmark's E Street Cinema) is not rated. It contains mature themes.

EVERYBODY'S FINE

(95 minutes, at area theaters) is rated PG-13 for thematic elements and brief strong profanity.

VIDEO ON THE WEB To watch the trailer for "Up in the Air" and video interviews with Jason Reitman, visit [washingtonpost.com/movies](http://www.washingtonpost.com/movies).

Who has time for catnaps? Cameras capture Fluffy's day.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — What do cats do when their owners are away? There was one way to find out — "cat cams." Fifty house cats were given collar cameras that took a photo every 15 minutes. The results put

a digital dent in some human theories about catnapping.

Based on the photos, about 22 percent of the cats' time was spent looking out of windows, 12 percent was used to interact with other family pets and 8 percent was spent climbing on chairs or kitty condos. Just 6 percent of their hours were spent

sleeping.

"What surprised me was how active the cats were. I believed my three cats were sleeping during the day," said Jill Villarreal, an animal behavior scientist who collected the data for Nestle Purina PetCare's Friskies brand of cat food.

The 777 photos studied by Villarreal showed the cats looking at a television, computer, DVDs or other media 6 percent of the time and hiding under tables 6 percent of the time.

Coming in at 5 percent was playing with toys; eating or looking at food finished at 4 percent.

Will the cats get movie cameras next? "We are in the think tank now," Villarreal said.



SMILE, KITTY: Leo-Hector was among felines whose activities were photographed regularly.