

GALLERIES

IN THE GALLERIES

At Adamson, Gordon Parks's rediscovered studies in color

BY MARK JENKINS

In 1956, Life magazine photographer Gordon Parks traveled to southern Alabama to document the life of an extended African American family living under the oppression of Jim Crow laws. Although best known for his black-and-white images, Parks shot more than 200 color pictures, many of which were not rediscovered until 2012, six years after his death. Adamson Gallery's "Segregation Story" features 26 of them.

Some of the beautifully composed scenes reveal an alienation echoed in the title of one picture, "Outside Looking In." In that image, black children gaze through a fence at a whites-only playground. In another image, a window-shopping black girl and her grandmother gaze at clothing on white mannequins; Parks carefully framed the shot so that the dummies are in the foreground, and the would-be shoppers are separated from both the store and the viewer.

Social hierarchy isn't always so clear, however. In one of the few pictures not made in or around Mobile, a black nanny holds a white baby in the waiting room of Atlanta's airport; a woman who is likely the child's mother sits nearby, superior in status yet dependent. The show also includes a vignette with three young playmates, two black and one white, who seem unaware — temporarily at least — of color. In an unintentional foreshadowing of recent controversies, the two African American boys in the shot are brandishing toy guns.

Seen in retrospect, residents of the segregated South seem, in Parks's series, to have more in common with each other than with their modern descendants. The clothing — a boy in a red cowboy hat, girls in pleated dresses with bows and white collars — and the small-town, Space-Age architecture are all of a piece. Only the signs that differentiate "colored" and "white" divide this lost world. But Parks, born in segregated Kansas in 1912, knew that those signs represented unease as well as injustice. His segregation stories convey both the political and the psychological burden of an American apartheid.

Gordon Parks: Segregation Story On view through Aug. 29 at Adamson Gallery, 1515 14th St. NW. 202-232-0707. www.adamsongallery.com.

Larry Cook

The title of Larry Cook's Hamiltonian Gallery show alludes to the phenomenon of hostages who come to identify with their captors. Taking the name "Stockholm Syndrome" from the aftereffects of a 1973 Swedish bank robbery, the show, for Cook, suggests the twofold larceny perpetuated by the trans-Atlantic slave trade: First, Africans were robbed of their freedom, and then of their identity.

The Maryland artist uses sound and video clips appropriated from movies and TV shows about slavery, as well as a reproduction of a painting of a "whitewashed" Jesus. Visitors can observe themselves in mirrors as they listen, on headphones, to a someone who is being persuaded — under the sting of a whip — to accept a new name of European origin. More hopefully, Cook pairs video clips of terrorized slaves with shots of the crowd listening to Barack Obama's 2008 victory speech.

"Stockholm Syndrome" recalls the sort of African American cultural broadsides common in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The curious thing is that Cook thinks this sort of consciousness-raising is still necessary. The sad thing is that he's probably right.

Larry Cook: Stockholm Syndrome On view through June 20 at Hamiltonian Gallery, 1353 U St. NW, Suite 101. 202-332-1116. www.hamiltoniangallery.com.

Justin D. Strom & Akemi Maegawa

Justin D. Strom has a rich inner life — and so do you. The local artist's vivid mixed-media digital prints, showcased in the D.C. Arts Center exhibition "Self/Non-Self: Sequence and Abstraction," are inspired by electron-microscope photographs of human tissue, as well as by such sillier exercises in miniaturization as "Fantastic Voyage," the 1966 sci-fi movie in which shrunken scientists cruise somebody's bloodstream. Yet the large-scale works also evoke classical floral still lifes, their bold reds heightened against black backgrounds.

Although the superimposed forms are abstract, they evoke real organs, muscles and blossoms. They're organic and artificial, messy and pristine. Coated with clear resin, which is sometimes thickly applied, the



MICHELINE KLAGSBRUN / STUDIO GALLERY

pictures shine as if under glass. The body's ebb and flow is frozen in an idealized pictorial moment.

The notion of art that exists in the physical realm — say, on paper, canvas or celluloid — seems increasingly quaint in these digital times. But Akemi Maegawa has struck a small blow against virtuality. Her "Thank You Artist Friends on Facebook Project," also at DCAC, consists of 317 two-inch-square porcelain tiles, each handmade and etched with a simple illustration. The pictures, mostly but not exclusively of people, turn out to be the Japanese-born, Washington-based ceramicist's renderings of Facebook profile pictures. The tiny squares are barely more substantial than pixels, yet they have a pleasing solidity. They may chip or crack, but will never need to be refreshed.

Justin D. Strom: Self/Non-Self: Sequence and Abstraction on view through June 14 and **Akemi Maegawa: Thank You Artist Friends on**

"Ghost Manzanita" is one of Micheline Klagsbrun's "Vessels of Light" on exhibit at Studio Gallery.

Facebook Project through June 21 at District of Columbia Arts Center, 2438 18th St. NW. 202-462-7833. www.dcartscenter.org.

Joyce McCarten & Micheline Klagsbrun

When her replacement hip failed, Joyce McCarten didn't curse her luck. Okay, maybe she did initially, but then the local artist turned to making the paintings and drawings that comprise "My Beautiful Bones." The Studio Gallery show consists mostly of large oils in shades of gray and calcium-white, with several variations. Some pictures are more realistic than others, and a few feature a symbolic twist. In "Thriving," for instance, the branches of a budding sapling grow through a bony matrix.

"Bones" also includes charcoal drawings in which white forms are set off against black backdrops, and paintings where the background is a brownish red — a reference, perhaps, to the role of bone marrow in the production of red blood cells. Even when the skeletal rhythm and symmetry are disrupted by the appearance of harsh metal appliances, there is no sense of violence here. Whatever McCarten's inspiration, her intent is beauty.

Downstairs at the gallery, the work of Micheline Klagsbrun demonstrates how the artist has expanded her style. "Vessels of Light" are ink paintings on layered paper molded into bowl-like forms, sometimes held in place by wire. If the shapes recall pottery, the translucent material is more reminiscent of paper lanterns. Some pieces incorporate shells, roots or other earthy elements, but the mostly blue palette evokes water and sky.

The exhibition also features wall hangings in a similar mode. The D.C. artist draws, pours and splashes ink on paper, emphasizing fluidity, accretion and the mutations she has previously rendered more literally in paintings based on Ovid's "Metamorphoses." Taking this technique off the wall is just another form of transformation, and a natural move toward infusing her art with light.

Joyce McCarten: My Beautiful Bones and **Micheline Klagsbrun: Vessels of Light** On view through June 20 at Studio Gallery, 2108 R St. NW. 202-232-8734. www.studiogallerydc.com. style@washpost.com

Jenkins is a freelance writer.

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