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Brief Picture: Exhibitions at R.B. Stevenson, Scott White, & Quint Galleries

ARTS NEWS

VISUAL ARTS REVIEW

by Kraig Cavanaugh

Gail Roberts; “Blanket: Twenty-one Seagull” (2013) from Roberts’s “Fibonacci Series.”
Image: © 2013 by Gail Roberts. Image courtesy of Scott White Contemporary Art.

“Gail Roberts: Spiral,” on view at [Scott White Contemporary Art](#), features colorful paintings with subjects of bird’s nests and feathers. In her painting Litter (2013), a tornado of twigs is seated in awkward position just above the very center of the canvas. As painted with Roberts’s fine gift for color and brushwork, the canvas’s nest plays on the theme of the spiral: how twigs intertwine into a nest’s naturally reoccurring circular form based on repeating Golden Rectangles, known as the Golden Spiral (aka the Fibonacci Spiral). The many nest paintings in the exhibition impart a disquieting air because of the slight, intentional imbalance in each of the compositions. The nests are also all empty save for trace debris of feathers. All of this invokes the notion of the spiral as a symbol for decay, entropy, and loss.

Less disquieting is Robert’s “Fibonacci Series.” This grid of twelve paintings on marble tiles each depicts certain amounts of feathers that follow the mathematical formula for the Fibonacci numerical sequence: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 31, 21, etc. The amount of depicted feathers in each of the paintings is the sum of the feathers from the previous two works in the series. The twelve paintings in the cycle begin with Blanket: One Hawk (2013). Here, Roberts painted one isolated feather appearing to float above the background of the marble square along with the feather’s cast shadow that appears to be on the tile itself. A few extra painted trompe l’oeil veins of color have also been added to the marble tile. This artwork and most of the others in the series assume a sensual tranquility that complements the calculated mathematical sequence.

As the series progresses, the logic of the required number of feathers remains faithful and necessary to the concept, although the additional painted cast shadows slowly become burdensome due to the compositions becoming overly busy. This is particularly true in the final two panels of the twelve-part series, Blanket: One Hundred Forty-four Pheasant (2013) and Blanket: Two Hundred Thirty-three Turkey (2013), which become visual cataclysms. Especially the eleventh panel that features tiny pheasant feathers, it completely loses coherence and tranquil unity to become a mere triumph in painting one hundred forty-four small quills. Though, this is the finest overall exhibition of Robert’s work in recent memory.

“Alternative Approaches” runs June 8 through July 20th, “Gail Roberts: Spiral” runs June 8th through July 27th, and “Mara De Luca: Even if the Lights Go Out” runs June 8th through July 27th.

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Kraig Cavanaugh

Kraig Cavanaugh is a multiple award winning art critic and also an art and art history educator, author, and curator who specializes in Modern and Contemporary Art. Recently, he was accepted as a member of the International Association of Art Critics-United States (AICA-USA), which was founded in 1949 and originally affiliated with UNESCO as a non-governmental organization. He also received both his BFA and MFA from California Institute of the Arts and, thus, is also a former CalArts "brat."

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