

Tanya Hartman, Tracy Krumm offer contrasting but compatible visions at Sherry Leedy

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On exhibit

"Tanya Hartman: We Write Ourselves Anew" and "Tracy Krumm: In the Making" continue at Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, 2004 Baltimore Ave. through June 29. Hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday & by appointment. For more information, call 816-221-2626 or go to www.SherryLeedy.com.

While no specific themes connect Tanya Hartman's beaded shields and prayer paddles to Tracy Krumm's crocheted metal wire sculptures, their shows at Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art complement each other in subject and tone. Krumm's exhibit, "In the Making," features large curtain structures of metal wire, crocheted and woven together. Found objects such as metal hooks, giant screws and strainers create supporting structures for each piece. In all the works there is a patina of copper, wood and rust, with glimmers of shiny silver here and there. But each sculpture is based on negative space, the empty air between the strands of wire.

In one large piece, "Wall Curtain (Saw Blade)," three layered sheets of crocheted wire hang from an enormous, nine-foot-long saw blade. Suspended from the aged rusted saw, the wire curtain becomes a skeleton, as if it may have been an armature for cloth or paper that has weathered away with time.

A statement at the exhibition describes Krumm's artwork as an "unlikely pairing of the traditionally feminine art of crochet and the masculine metalwork of blacksmithing." This is an apt description of the work, which combines utilitarian objects such as bolts and handles with more decorative forms. The elegance of the weaving, combined with the aged objects, gives Krumm's work the paradoxical feeling of being new and antique.

Tanya Hartman's "We Write Ourselves Anew" comprises multimedia sculptures made of beads, fabric, paint, text, bones, wood and other materials. Hartman calls these sculptures prayer paddles and shields. All of the sculptures have intricate surfaces, a wild terrain of beading and embroidery accented by small bits of printed text and paint; no surface is left unadorned.

Hartman models her prayer paddles after the fans used by Mexican shamans when performing healing rituals to reunite a sad person's soul with his or her body. On each of her paddles, prayers spiral around the decorations, most beginning with the phrase "Dear Lord God, Please..."

While Hartman's shields have a similar visual style, they tell different stories, those of Luai Deng Akoon. Born in south Sudan, Akoon was recruited into an armed group as a child soldier. "Many People Died That Night" is a large shield with multiple handles, with a beaded pattern of orange and white triangles. In the center of the shield, a list of names reads "Mother, Father, Sister, Brother, Aunt, Uncle, Friend, Teacher, Neighbor."



Tracy Krumm's "Wall Curtain (Saw Blade)" is part of her exhibit of crocheted metal wire sculptures at Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art.

“Secrets and Outtakes,” a triptych of shields, contains stories so private and painful that Akoon is not willing to share them, and the text is obscured with old metal springs and scraps of metal. Words stick out here and there: “jawbone,” “corpse,” “ripped.” No definite narrative is clear, only the implications of dark events.

A third project by Hartman, titled “What Was Beautiful Today,” is made up of 365 pages of text that have been erased and written over. Each text represents a day in a year. Take Day 10, for instance: “What was beautiful today? Today, the sun shone in swathes that sequined like silver swells on an earthen sea.” Yet not all days reflect such simple pleasures. Others reflect feelings of loss and trauma; some celebrate friendship, pets or lovers.

At some point, this excessive disclosure of information becomes awkward and uncomfortable. Some of the stories are so personal that reading them, one feels intrusive and overburdened with detail. “We Write Ourselves Anew” creates a sense of anxiety, of being flooded in another person’s memories. Luckily, you can always stand back and allow the text to become illegible as the words sink into the beaded detailing.

Krumm’s formalist exploration of metalwork and fiber art offers a pleasant contrast to the spiritual and emotional artworks of Hartman. Both artists’ works are strong enough to stand alone.