

ART REVIEW: Photo exhibit offers much to see at Montserrat College in Beverly

Wednesday

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"Observance: As I See You, You See Me," an exhibition of five photographers' works on view now in the main Montserrat Gallery, does not just show selfies. And calling the selfies that are exhibited "selfies" would be ridiculous. Digging deeply into the subjective nature of investigating and capturing the personal image, this show surrounds its sitters with history and culture, and still takes a hard look at the individual.

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

If you go...

WHAT: Observance (photographs), and George Frary: A Borrowed Landscape

WHERE: Montserrat College of Art galleries, 23 Essex St., Beverly

WHEN: Observance through April 8; Frary through March 9

TICKETS: Free. Visit www.montserrat.edu or call 978-921-4242

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Of all the possible subjects for photographs, people work best. And of all the possible people, the self might be the most revealing.

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Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons works in various media, extending the creative dialogue between her Cuban past and her longtime American life in many directions. Each direction taken brings unique discoveries. Here, in five color photographs, Campos-Pons situates herself as a subject in evocative and elusive cultural settings.

Most striking: a triptych of prints, "Songs of Freedom," in which the sitter's head resides in a birdcage. Stylized, elegant and unsettling, Campos-Pons makes multiple arguments come alive — arguments about entrapment, liberty, choice.

Ervin A. Johnson shows two enormous color photos-and-mixed media, straight-on head shots that have been distressed with acid or solvent. The two works dominate the room, enigmatically.

Caleb Cole creates intense narratives through his seven inkjet prints. Using himself as a model, mostly occupying other people's residences (and thus their identities), Cole sits expressionless for himself on carefully manicured "sets." "Lottery Ticket," with the artist on a bench holding a (presumably) losing wager, a single misplaced glove on the bench next to him, allows the viewer multiple story lines to pursue.

Working together, Juan Jose Barboza-Gubo and Andrew Mroczek have chosen as subjects various members of the transgender community of Lima, Peru. Taken from their series "Virgenes de la Puerta," the duo set their subjects, poignantly posed, in tableaux that incorporate religious and cultural artifacts.

DEAD STAR ART is a painter, or was. A performance artist, perhaps. Here, a photographic miniaturist, with a series of blurred focus Polaroids — tiny Polaroids — of nondescript outdoors shots and individuals that seem to be part of a collaborative, a social network — or maybe just random, provocatively dressed passersby. Actually the notes say they were part of the Bathaus, an artist's residence and collective. You decide. It's worth the try.

Work by George Frary

In the hallway Schlosberg Gallery, George Frary shows two dozen or so works on paper, mostly acrylic, graphite and charcoal. In composition, they are geometric, abstract landscapes, potentially granite formations, that evoke (visually at least) similar works by Roger Martin or Marsden Hartley.

But while Martin's and Hartley's paintings have a true feel of granite in them, Frary's landscapes rise above that. Frary's works are architectural, with heft; but an air of transcendent feeling overwhelms the physical. Mysterious, and thoughtful.

"Observance" remains on view through April 8; Frary's paintings through March 9. Visit www.montserrat.edu/galleries or call 978-921-4242.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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