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## REVIEW Review: Making labor appear effortless

Six artists share exhibition at NBAM/ArtWorks!

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"Gilbreth/Mountain" by Tim Bearse is featured in "Idle Trades" at New Bedford Art Museum/ArtWorks! COURTESY PHOTO

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**By Keith Powers**  
Contributing writer

Posted Feb. 18, 2016 at 2:01 AM

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William Butler Yeats' "Adam's Curse" is a tricky poem. It seems to be about love, but it isn't. About happiness, but it's not. About work, but it really says that hard work is pointless, unless the result looks effortless.

"Idle Trades," a small but nicely integrated exhibition on view now at the New Bedford Art Museum, takes its title from Yeats' poem, and incorporates its central premise about hard work: Don't let them see you sweat. Art-making is a process, certainly; but only the artist should know about it, not the viewer.

Yeats was talking about poetry, of course: "A line will take us hours maybe; yet if it does not seem a moment's thought, Our stitching and unstitching has been naught." But for the visual artist as well, burying the intensity of the artist's craft beneath a surface of beauty means everything. If the hard work is apparent, the creation seems more about the effort than the aesthetics.

Six artists bring their craft to this exhibition, which is curated by Elizabeth Murphy. Each artist is different, each accomplished in their own way. Brad Fesmire's large acrylic on wood, "Work Like a Mule," serves as a symbol for the entire show. A large piece on plywood, with a routed surface, only a simple fence is visible over what appears to be a field.

No mule, no workers, no crops. Gentle acrylic wash covers the surface. It's as if the work of the mule happened long ago, and the result is peaceful, cultivated and ordered. It's a simple piece, and its effect is simple as well.

Fesmire shows five other works, including "A Seasonal Yankee," also acrylic on wood with cedar shakes incorporated. Its title also harkens to the idea of dedicated labor, and its effect also belies the energy that goes into any finished product.

Elizabeth Alexander's porcelain carvings bring an alternate twist to the idea of decorative arts. Taking fine (but not exquisite) chinaware, and then carefully cutting it and assembling it into

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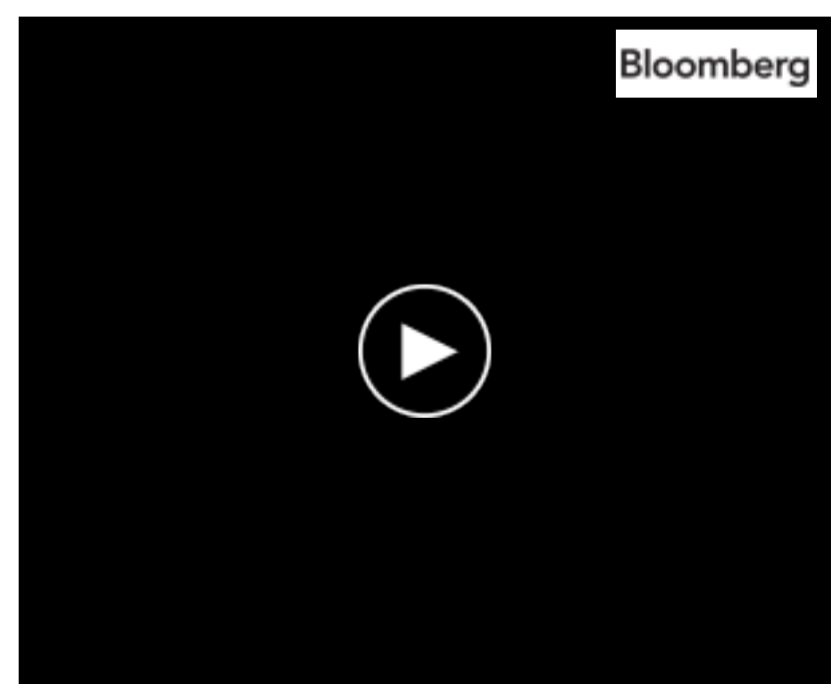
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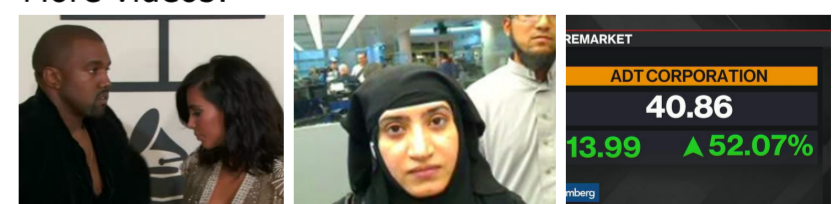
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sculptural shapes, Alexander's found-and-cut pieces bring two layers to the idea of craft: the initial, practical use of dinner service, and the secondary, ornamental use that the artist has invented.

Her "Illustrated Guide to Tableware" — faux chinaware made of paper and glue, presumably trying to emerge into its final form — brings her collection of seven pieces to its logical conclusion: making something into an ideal — out of next to nothing.

Tim Bearse's large works dominate the center of the exhibition. Wood, metal and concrete seem torn from some broader idea — actually, from some greater structure, perhaps even an industrial one. The concept of work here seems hinted at, included by its exclusion in a way.

Neal Walsh shows half a dozen canvases, oil with dry pigment collages. "Under Circumstances" and "Between Forgiveness" both use materials that seem simultaneously intentional and found — the way some artisan might accomplish any practical task, first using materials at hand and then supplementing as needed.

Matt Murphy, showing three large paintings thematically related in his "Planet Caravan" series, and Sam Duket, with sculptural pieces of wood and veneer that sit on plinths or fit gently into angled spaces, continue the pervasive theme of work as a starting point in creation.

Work? That's easy. Not making it look like work is hard.

"Idle Trades" runs through March 20 at the New Bedford Art Museum. For information and hours visit [www.newbedfordart.org](http://www.newbedfordart.org) or call 508-961-3075.

*Keith Powers is an art and music writer who lives in Rockport.*

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-  **Dena Haden Recollection** All Day  
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-  **Icons of the Civil Rights Movement Art Exhibit** All Day  
New Bedford Art Museum
-  **“Nothing without Everything”** 9:00 am  
Groundwork!
-  **Thursday Morning Book Discussion Group** 10:00 am  
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