

ART REVIEW: Montserrat show features aerial perspectives of Derek Lerner

Tuesday

Posted at 4:11 PM

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By Keith Powers / Correspondent

If you go...

WHAT: Derek Lerner: "42°33'00.51" N 70°52'33.57 W"

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

WHEN: through April 15

TICKETS: Free. Visit www.montserrat.edu/galleries or call 978-867-9604.

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We all live on a map. In Derek Lerner's world, that puts us in lots of danger.

Lerner's current exhibition, "42°33'00.51" N 70°52'33.57 W," on view now at Montserrat's Schlosberg Gallery, doesn't really have any maps. But with its aerial perspective, its cross-hatch indications, its distinct sense of destruction planned and subsequently noted, you can't help the feeling of being watched.

Lerner's exhibition — the title marks the exact location of the Schlosberg Gallery — would have no meaning without our familiarity in the jargon of drones, surveillance and the "Orwell-come-true" notion of Big Brother. Like most strong exhibitions, it speaks volumes about these things without ever mentioning them at all.

The small show has five drawings, all monochromatically blue ink on white paper. The works are all similar, varying in size: abstract compositions with parallel lines in orderly fashion, some criss-crossing to indicate grids, large circles perhaps indicating more general geographies, blotches of ink disrupting the overall orderliness, and some colored-in sections, both light and dark. All blue, with the slightest bit of red (causing purple) in the darkest areas.

Lerner's notes to the exhibition reference ideas about viruses, and disease. And drones. The titles are inscrutable: AVEX4 and 5, Asvirus 62, 63 64.

As color fields, and as compositions, nothing seems ominous about Lerner's work. The blue, with its rare but complementary purple harmony, sits lusciously on the white background. The drawings — one guesses they are drawings, but also paintings — leave lots of white, open space. They feel natural, open, harmonious, inviting.

The perspective that the aerial view gives proves unsettling. It invites the viewer to feel like the viewed — as if under a microscope, or in the cross-hairs of a drone. We can't actually observe from this perspective in real life — except in a plane — but we can be observed this way. It doesn't make you feel comfortable. It feels like faraway things are watching.

These works are unabashedly abstract, but they bring a sense of intentionality that also lends itself to the ominous feel. The idea that these are plotted out targets is inescapable. Some even feel like the target has been struck already: the two largest works, Asvirus 62 and AVEX4, seem to show damage that has already been inflicted, bloodlessly documented on some bombardier's screen or a high-powered microscope.

"42°33'00.51" N 70°52'33.57 W" marks the third and final exhibition in curator Leonie Bradbury's series on contemporary versions of landscape. The series previously included Katherine Mitchell DiRico's "Data Sets" and George Frary III's "A Borrowed Landscape."

All three exhibitions struck down the notion that landscapes could only be captured en plein air, inspired by the natural world. Each examined the fruitful idea of imaginary landscapes — dreams of geography, sometimes nightmarish.

"42°33'00.51" N 70°52'33.57 W" remains on view through April 15 at the Schlosberg Gallery on the Montserrat campus. For information visit www.montserrat.edu/galleries or call 978-867-9604.

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