

ART REVIEW: 'MashUp' entices thought at Montserrat's 301 Gallery

Monday Posted Sep 19, 2016 at 2:01 PM

Updated Sep 19, 2016 at 2:01 PM

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

If you go...

WHAT: "MashUp: Objects in Dialogue"

WHERE: 301 Gallery, Montserrat College of Art, 301 Cabot St., Beverly

WHEN: through Sept. 24

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

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You've got a favorite cup or plate, with a chip in it. If it's really a favorite, you remember how the chip got there — and who did it. It may just be one piece in the practical part of your home, but the memory of it holds meaning.

For Elizabeth Alexander, the chip is the art. Not just any random, accidental chip, but a purposeful extraction made in the porcelain or china, with a careful cutting tool. Alexander excises the ornate decorations originally found on fine china, and what remains is — well, what is it that remains?

Sculpture. Some of it "negative" sculpture — more of what's not there, than what is there. Carefully arranged, sometimes glued into unusual standing positions, Alexander's transformed, irregular decorative arts speak gracefully — with a missing tooth.

Her work forms the centerpiece of a spare but enthralling exhibition on view at Montserrat College of Art's 301 Gallery. Called "MashUp: Objects in Dialogue," it also includes reworked decorative arts by Molly Hatch and Christina Pitsch.

Hatch creates ceramic installations. At least that's what they seem like. Her work on display — 78 plates organized horizontally and vertically, hand thrown and hand painted, are decorated with what might be a narrative in mind. The installation's title, "After Rigaud: Versailles Orangerie," references a little known painting from the 17th century.

The idea of allusion is enough. Circular details from Rigaud's painting do appear in some plates, in no exact order. But the reference is so obscure, and the visual clues so happenstance, that drilling deep into the centuries-old original can't be the real purpose. A stylized treatment of a stylized subject, Hatch's work stands out an alternate way to decorate, its meaning cached in a most everyday object — a dinner plate.

Christina Pitsch has a thing for hooves. Her "mash-up" throws porcelain deer hooves on chandeliers, aligns them on tables in geometric swirls, slicks them up with gold leaf. Of course the porcelain is delicate, pure in its alabaster perfection.

But the subject matter's juxtaposition is vaguely gruesome. We love our nature, especially in the arts, but when the truth about how we come to acquire animal parts — the hunting, skinning and carving most of us avoid — gets gussied up with fine porcelain, somehow it seems like someone is being mocked. Most cleverly.

"MashUp: Objects in Dialogue" runs through Sept. 24 at Montserrat's 301 Gallery, 301 Cabot St., Beverly. Dorothea van Camp's mixed media work goes on display at Montserrat's Schlossberg Gallery Sept. 14. Both shows are free. For information visit www.montserrat.edu or call 978-921-4242.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow @PowersKeith; email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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