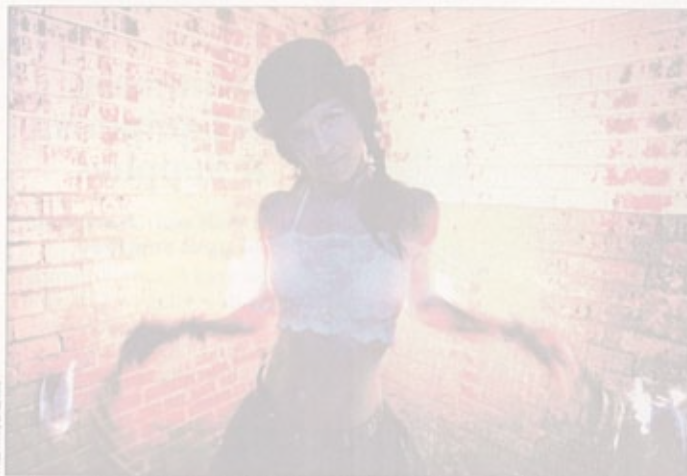


REVIEWS

CHARLOTTESVILLE'S CULTURE BIN

reviews@c-ville.com



A bunch of characters: The mysterious provocateurs of *Shentai* transformed the Ix Building into an otherworldly carnival.

Shentai

Ix Building

Through July 1

stage What is it about Charlottesville and art? Whence springs the rich, organic, artistic funkiness that pervades this place and its people? After a night of *Shentai*, I have decided that perhaps the nine Muses, in a wild, ululating, naked race to strew creativity across the earth, lingered here longer than other places. It's in the air, in the dirt, and lord knows it's in the Ix building—that rambling, seductive, industrial castle of gorgeous decay and subtle renewal.

On foot you enter the Ix gates for *Shentai*, where the world falls away and a dream-state ensues. Guided by carnies, you walk into a vast space, forested with columns and spiked with twinkle lights and Chinese lanterns in the distance, glowing like planets. You run into a friend who says, "I got a gumball from the Toy Monkey. A blue one."

The waiting crowd mills behind fences of found objects—logs, metal, string, a sequinned pen. A lovely girl in tulle stands still, holding red curtains closed. Sullen ladies sell beer and dancers cavort in a domed enclosure, egged on by the Toy Monkey. Far across the space, the sound of the sea echoes and a woman in white (Sarah White) sings a high, strange song and, carved by side light, washes her arms in a tin bucket of water. You could watch this for some time, or until a four-legged stilt-walker creeps mantis-like from behind a

poisoned mountain and gazes towards you before slowly retreating.

Soon you are loosed into a grand space neither interior nor exterior, with green trees visible beyond gaping walls and the cool June air swirling through the cavernous ceiling. The Accordion Death Squad regales the crowd with expert fiddle, accordion, piano, banjo and more, and Pepin Schmetterling (Jennifer Hoyt Tidwell) and Sigga Valsdottir (Bree Luck) lay down the rules of the evening. A drunken stilt-walker (Johnny Fogg) staggers past. A beautiful woman (Spiral) wields a spinning hoop around herself and through the air. Two

dancers (Rachael Shaw and Bruna Longo) slither slowly through a rope net suspended above your head.

Soon it becomes difficult to resist the absurd dangers of the Ix 50 Bicycle Rodeo & Dignity Stripper Game Show, emceed by Christian Breeden. Then, the linguistic labyrinth of Tidwell's short play, *Dido vs. The Squid Monster*, captivates with the maniacally lovely Stan Richards and Kara McLane Burke, unmissable in flippers and tentacles.

The evening marches on, with *A Dead Whale or A Stove Boat!* by Nimrod Shentai (Jude Silveira), who may call upon you to act the whale using a pink flamingo; or the strange *Natural History Peep Show*, directed by Dinah Gray. Pity any foolish business who turned down a chance for the Vampirates (Good Foot Dance Company) to concoct a sponsorship skit for them, embedded in a fabulous tap dance.

The Kindled Flame—a culminating fire dance created by Kelly East with 15 performers—hypnotizes. For a moment you might wish to watch the spinning sticks and batons, the swinging candles and flaming angels, from far across the Ix compound where the fire would flicker and illumine and confuse through transparent walls of brick and metal. But up close you sit near the heat, glimpsing the smudged faces of the dancers as they spin the bright flames, catching the dense whoosh of fire rushing through air until the bright orange fades to blue flame and the evening draws to a gorgeous, satisfying close. You may, perhaps, have to come back again.—*Les Marshall*

"Women in Printmaking: A Variety Show"

Migration: A Gallery

Through August 24

art A solitary figure lies played out in a grassy field; an anonymous hand pickpockets a young girl as she helps a man collect his fallen groceries; a lonesome creek winds

its way past the trunks of two dead trees bathed in moonlight. Sounds disjointed, right? These three scenes come from prints by Betty MacDonald, Foust—who, like Prince and Homer, is known by a single name—and Margie Crisp, the three artists currently displaying their work at Migration, on the Downtown Mall.

At first glance, Migration's "Women in Printmaking: A Variety Show" seems a default summer exhibit hastily cobbled together. Aside from sex and medium, the artists have very little in common, certainly not enough to warrant a group show. But first impressions, or so the saying goes, can be deceiving. And, if you take the time to consider and reconsider the works by MacDonald, Foust and Crisp, a subtle and nuanced connection emerges.

Betty MacDonald's work is clever and playful. Her "Floating Hearts" don't float but flop atop what appear to be long poles. In "Motioning Growth," a stern human finger gestures a bundle of foliage to come hither; the weeds and flowers recoil in horror. But for all their levity, MacDonald's prints eventually betray an underlying sense of isolation: The hearts look deflated and remote; at odds, man and nature are separated by an increasingly vast gulf.

Foust relishes a different kind of isolation. Forgoing MacDonald's lighthearted touch, she portrays stark scenes from the streets and apartments of cities not unlike her hometown of Richmond. For Foust, the most lonesome spaces are those filled with people; people ready to steal from you sooner than look at you, people who refuse to forgive, who turn away and won't turn back. Unwilling to laugh at life, Foust finds people alone together.

Margie Crisp designs prints defined by romantic solitude. Her favored perspective—a lofty and removed bird's-eye

view—detaches the viewer from the pastoral scenes she depicts. We see the country garden but we can't stroll through it; we're left to wonder what's behind the single illuminated window in that isolated cottage.

Despite its misleadingly facile title, "Women in Printmaking" presents the work of three talented artists who beautifully convey—and here's that common thread, if you missed it—loneliness and isolation, each in her own understated way. In their intricacy, these prints demand repeat visits to Migration between now and the show's close.—*Ian MacDougall*



"United" by Betty MacDonald at Migration: A Gallery.

Reading into it

<http://marksarvas.blogspot.com/elegvar>

At the risk of sounding like a whiny, pretentious brat, I'm going to go ahead and say that—English major that I used to be (still am?)—I miss some of that high-falutin' book talk I used to get in college. Gone are the days of debating Hardy over the cafeteria table, replaced with albeit more timely subjects, such as Lohan's latest relapse, debated over the cubicle partition. It's gotten to the point where I probably read the same amount as I did in college in terms of word count, except that now it's all on the Internet and it's all poisoned with unhealthy doses of snark. And I'm fighting mad at myself about this sad fact. "How did it come to this?" I ask myself while scrolling through Perez Hilton's celebrity gossip rag. It's then that I very deliberately dial my browser over to someplace like Mark Sarvas' blog, The Elegant Variation, in search of signs of intelligence in the universe.

The Elegant Variation is a literary blog and Sarvas is quite a literary-type guy (meaning he writes stuff and

all his friends write stuff and when they get together they are all very cool and smart and literary together, I'm sure). His first novel comes out next winter. The blog is heavy on the contemporary fiction talk, part lit-world gossip and chatter, part book reviews, part intelligent idle musings and, part pretentious idle musings and, for the most part, eminently readable. Sure, the guy can be a prick occasionally, but that's what keeps life exciting. And while I hate him sometimes, I also love that he gets me thinking about useless things that still matter to me in my better moments of self-awareness.

Personally, my favorite Elegant Variation activity is to stock up on my feelings of inadequacy by making sure that I take notes on the books he recommends that I will probably never get around to reading. I have a sneaking suspicion that these are mostly books by Sarvas' friends. But that's O.K., since he seems to have friends that I want. —*Nell Boeschenstein*

HIT THIS SITE

On foot you enter the Ix gates for *Shentai*, where the world falls away and a dream-state ensues. Guided by carnies, you walk into a vast space, forested with columns and spiked with twinkle lights and Chinese lanterns.