

GreenHill puts on 'Animated,' the Triad's most entertaining show of the year

Tom Patterson/Special Correspondent | Posted: Sunday, October 27, 2013 12:00 am

GREENSBORO — The most entertaining art show I've seen in the Triad this year is the exhibition of digital animation, comic art and related works at GreenHill. That's the new, streamlined name for the Green Hill Center for North Carolina Art.

For "Animated!," Edie Carpenter, GreenHill's curator, selected works by 24 artists who specialize in sequential art, including comics, flip books, storyboards, claymation and other types of film animation.

The show's carousel-format kinetic animation devices by Ryan Buysens revisit pre-cinematic techniques for creating the illusion of figures in motion. The apparently moving figures in his Zoetrope-like works include a silhouetted rider on horseback, a butterfly and a tiny man made of wooden matches, who appears to be running.

Twentieth-century comic art and animated cartoons are referenced by several of the show's artists. For example, Eliseo Santos' richly detailed digital prints and sketches reflect the influences of animated-cartoon masters Max Fleischer, Walt Disney and the staff artists at "Mad" magazine. Santos' works are evidently from a narrative in which a very apprehensive-looking cartoon monkey wearing an astronaut suit wanders through a series of psychedelic landscapes where scary monsters lurk among the exotic vegetation and giant mushrooms.

Paul Friedrich works in a much-more stripped-down style derived in part from comic artists like George Herriman, creator of the early 20th-century comic strip "Krazy Kat." Friedrich has paintings, prints and paperback books featuring his signature character, Onion Head Monster, along other characters including his own renditions of Batman and Evel Knievel.

Japanese manga comics and animated films are prominent influences on Thomas Spradling's "Superfat" series, whose title plays on the superflat style of Takashi Murakami, a Japanese artist. These paintings, drawings and prints, including tiny prints dispensed from a Japanese toy-vending



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Space Mono Travel Log: Dozy Lagoon
by Eliseo Santos.

machine, hint at an overarching narrative centering on a cherubically cutesy blond baby named Mario.

Trevor Van Meter has an animated video cartoon, a series of vinyl toys based on his cartoon characters and several screen prints reminiscent of Ed “Big Daddy” Roth’s graphic art. The protagonist in Van Meter’s “Crappy Cat Loop,” a hilarious animated video cartoon, is a booze-guzzling feline whose real or hallucinated adventures unfold over a little more than three minutes. It had me laughing throughout.

Jason Carpenter employs a more straightforward, stylized brand of cartoon animation in his ominously creepy short film “The Renter,” which recounts a young boy’s daycare nightmare. At the outset a car, presumably driven by one of the boy’s parents, drops him off at an isolated rural boarding house where he spends the day with an elderly woman. The story also involves the beheading of chickens and the activities of an indolent, sour-faced man given to smoking cigarettes while lying in bed. The film’s chicken-soup fantasy sequence owes a debt to David Lynch’s surrealist dread-fest “Eraserhead.”

Mark Russo plunges viewers into much darker territory in his stunning animated-video installation “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” which outdoes everything else in the show. Russo employs state-of-the-art digital animation techniques to give lifelike depth and texture to a metaphorical re-imagining of St. John’s Revelation. Separate film sequences on the themes of Silence, Decay, Consumption and Death play repeatedly and simultaneously on the installation’s four screens.

Collectively these interrelated sequences present a bleak vision of the future. Humankind is represented as a doomed tribe of robed figures wearing identical bird-beaked masks. These hapless beings appear to function as slaves and torture victims for giant mutant insects and robotic aliens lording it over a murky, scorched-earth landscape. At key points Russo intercuts grainy excerpts from news or documentary footage showing victims and perpetrators of contemporary warfare.

In contrast to the horrific sci-fi wasteland that Russo conjures, the lifelike world John Weldy renders in his work is mundane, closely based on his recollections of his own childhood. And instead of sophisticated digital technology, he relies on old-school handcrafting techniques to create his set and characters.

Weldy’s set is a one-fourth scale sculptural rendering of his childhood home’s interior, and two of his meticulously detailed puppet figures represent his father and himself as a child, both dressed as if for a casual summer outing on the water. The third figure, identified only as Frank, is a shirtless, sickly-looking, bug-eyed man with a bulging stomach, lying inert in a hospital bed. Weldy created

them for an autobiographical animated video that's not included in the show.

Other works that merit special mention in this lively, engaging show include Paige Cox's fabric-sculpture figures, David Huyck's cartoon screen prints and books and a remarkable interactive digital projection by an animation-art collective known as Advanced Media Lab.