The largest paintings in Mira Hecht’s “in snow, blossom,” at Addison/Ripley Fine Art, might seem to fit Brian Eno’s definition of “ambient” art: “as ignorable as it is interesting.” Yet these mostly pastel pictures of overlapping circles can hardly be overlooked. Such soft-focus dreamscapes as “After Rain,” pale blue but seven feet tall, are both ephemeral and vivid.

Evanescent is not the D.C. artist’s only mode. In the show are two suites of smaller paintings with bolder hues and funkier forms, including the “Blazing World” set, in which circles become suns and explosions. (There also are bomb-like pieces in a selection of Hecht’s ceramics.) The “Unwind/Path” series features interlaced, loosely rendered loops in one or two other colors besides the recurring one. If that scheme sounds minimalist, the color that appears in all 15 is silver.
Among the larger pictures are several variations: Lines link the circles in “Over the Moon,” and “Realm of Joy/ Night” contains just one large blue orb on a field of black. Yet the wispiest paintings hold their own, even without silver or black. Their fragile hues and gentle contours suggest dawn light, early spring and things barely seen or scarcely remembered.


**Kanika Sircar**

A journey through Kanika Sircar’s “Mapquest” takes viewers of the Waverly Street Gallery show from her native India to Mars. She scatters fragments of text and bits of charts like shards of ancient pottery — and does so on pottery. Sircar works in stoneware and porcelain, which she shapes into tiles and rectangular flasks. (She calls them “boxes,” although their shape was partly inspired by saris.) These elegant vessels are decorated with lines, circles and images transferred from laser prints.

Ceramics begin as clay, and the D.C. artist highlights that origin with earthy, mottled and metallic colors. Each piece is a remade chunk of the terra firma that people claim, divide and contest. Trained as an anthropologist, as well as an artist, Sircar is interested in how ideas arise, spread and are distorted. Red lines represent Britain’s arbitrary partition of India in 1947, while ruts and rounds evoke Mars, misunderstood after the Italian “canali” (channels) was incorrectly translated as “canals.” Today’s cartography is more accurate than the fanciful renderings of the Red Planet made before modern telescopes. But Sircar’s art reminds us that all maps inscribe human preconceptions on territory that in reality is unlined.


**Power**

“Power” is one of the 300 most-used words in the English language, curator Lea-Ann Bigelow notes in her introduction to the Sparkplug Artists Collective’s show at the District of Columbia Arts Center. Not much concerned with soft power, the nine-artist “Power (I Know It When . . .)” addresses phenomena such as gentrification and homicide. David Ibata’s pop-realistic painting depicts two glowing African American samurai in front of a sign for planned condos. Jerome Skiscim cuts shapes out of black-and-white photos to signify the voids left by violence. Brendan L. Smith’s metal sculpture, accompanied by a sound piece, is studded with bullet shells, in memory of the Sandy Hook massacre victims.

Others ponder “power” literally as a text. Jerry Truong’s white-on-white piece consists entirely of words such as “struggle” and “militarize” printed on film. Megan Maher wrote and then smeared “power” and other words in black on white clayboard. The first is more legible than the second, but both can be read from either side of the power divide.
Power (I Know It When . . .) On view through Dec. 4 at the District of Columbia Arts Center, 2438 18th St. NW. 202-462-7833. deartscenter.org.

Bella Italia

It’s closer than Tuscany, but the gallery at Via Umbria is a bit of a hike. Up the stairs and beyond the test kitchen, the cookery store is hosting “Bella Italia,” featuring four members of the Washington Printmakers Gallery. The emphasis is on landscape, but Rosemary Cooley ventures into history, artistic and otherwise.

Nina Muys’s delicate prints depict small Italian towns; the palette is primarily in shades of clay and brick, sometimes set off by green woods or blue lagoons. Deron DeCesare’s prints and drawing are also cityscapes — vertical and with a strong sense of enclosure. Jane Mann’s digitally manipulated photos go for the opposite sensation, portraying fields that might roll forever under misty skies.

Cooley’s pieces are the most diverse, and include such Renaissance touches as gold leaf. The technique is classical, and so are such pictorial elements as ornate columns and arches. Yet the artist reveals a modern sensibility in the way she combines styles and subjects in a single picture. If the individual elements are precise, the overall effect is impressionistic.

Bella Italia On view through Nov. 29 at Via Umbria, 1525 Wisconsin Ave. NW. 202-333-3904. viaumbria.com/galleria/art-gallery.html.

Entertainment Alerts

Big stories in the entertainment world as they break.

Carol Rubin

Near the entrance to “Frisson,” Carol Rubin’s show at the Washington Studio School, is a painting of two fighting dogs. It’s a fine introduction to the local artist’s representational yet nearly abstract style, but not to her usual subjects. Most of the pictures are landscapes or florals, without canine commotion.

That doesn’t mean they’re subdued. “Spider Plant,” a pencil drawing, has a meteoric energy, even if the strokes depict nothing more explosive than a profusion of fronds. Many of the highlights are in graphite or pastel, with cool hues but bristling lines, such as the “Oriental Morning” series and “Vine in Blue Vase,” in which the container appears solid but the plant is barely there. Although literally planted, the vine appears as kinetic as those dueling dogs.

Frissons: Carol Rubin On view through Dec. 3 at Washington Studio School, 2129 S St. NW. 202-234-3030. washingtonstudioschool.org.

The Post Recommends