

## Style

# ‘Alchemical Vessels’ offers bowls full of healing

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By Mark Jenkins May 30, 2013

## Alchemical Vessels

Asking multiple artists to execute variations on a single item is a familiar gambit, as anyone who happens upon a tricked-up fiberglass donkey or elephant around town will be reminded. The object in the Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery’s “Alchemical Vessels” is a bowl, but the 125 contributors to this show didn’t begin with a piece of identical crockery to decorate. The finished objects are made from — to list only a few — acrylic, wood, pumice, raw clay and red flocking. The variations don’t stop there: The pieces include Barbara Frank’s spiraling twigs that penetrate the surface, Rosana Azar’s paintbrush tips arrayed in a circle and Bridget Sue Lambert’s toy house that sits on artificial turf inside its dishy setting.

The exhibition is a benefit for the Smith Center for Healing, which works with cancer survivors and caregivers. The center calls the vessels in the display metaphors for itself, “a space where healing can take place.” That aside, the bowl is an archetypal geometric shape, and one that neatly defines inside and out. Some of the bowls are jokey, while others seem solemn and even devotional. (Flip a bowl over, as Shelly Lowenstein does, and it looks like a Buddhist stupa.) Add the opposition between soft and hard, and the possibilities for juxtaposition become vast.

The variety is impressive, if also a little overwhelming. The bowls range from purely conceptual to potentially functional, and while some participants employ motifs and techniques from their customary work, others use the opportunity to attempt something new. Overall, the show reflects contemporary artists’ enthusiasm for mixing things up and developing artisanal skills that, a generation ago, many painters and sculptors would have considered beneath them. Here, the ability to make is just as important as the capacity to imagine.

## Alchemical Vessels

On view through June 7 at Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery, 1632 U St. NW; 202-483-8600; [www.smithcenter.org/arts-healing/joan-hisaoka-art-gallery.html](http://www.smithcenter.org/arts-healing/joan-hisaoka-art-gallery.html)

## Stash

Deborah Kass’s “Nobody Puts Baby in the Corner” resembles a Kenneth Noland “target” painting from the 1960s, with rings of bold colors that circle a lime-green center. The artist has painted the title phrase — paraphrasing a famous line from the 1987

movie “Dirty Dancing” — into the band closest to the center. The juxtaposition of austere modernism and exuberant kitsch is characteristic of “Stash,” the current exhibition at Heiner Contemporary.

The show’s concept is actually simpler than that: It’s just a collection of work the gallery had on hand, to be viewed by appointment only. Yet the seven-artist assortment — mostly prints, and mostly by New Yorkers — holds together well. It’s linked by common interests in color and form, and by contemporary variations on mid-20th-century abstraction. Ingrid Calame’s etchings render patterns in multiple hues; they appear lacy, but are actually traced from stains she finds on streets. Tara Donovan’s black-and-white print clusters circular arrangements of dots, suggesting either machinery or blossoms. And Polly Apfelbaum’s “Color Field Notes,” whose title makes explicit reference to ’60s abstraction, groups eight floral woodblock prints around a silk-screen print of a color wheel.

One motif is showing how parts make up the whole. Jon-Phillip Sheridan’s “Arc,” the only photo-based piece, portrays a plane of glass fractured into a shimmering spider web. In idea if not appearance, the work resembles Austin Thomas’s collage of vertical strips, “Relational Proposal — Notes on Pocket Utopia.” Both are fragmented, yet orderly. Kate Shepherd’s “Imagined Evening Day, Blue Brick Stage” is equally tidy, its forms geometric and its colors restricted to three shades of deep blue. Although simple and spare, the silk-screen simulates depth and even hints at landscape. It’s a good example of how the “Stash” artists employ, yet aren’t limited by, the modes of a half-century ago.

## **Stash: Polly Apfelbaum, Ingrid Calame, Tara Donovan, Deborah Kass, Kate Shepherd, Jon-Phillip Sheridan and Austin Thomas**

On view through June 8 at Heiner Contemporary, 1675 Wisconsin Ave NW; 202-338-0072; [www.heinercontemporary.com](http://www.heinercontemporary.com)

### **Michael Iacovone &**

### **Carly Witmer**

The black-and-white photographs and colorful paintings regard each other from opposite walls of the Heurich Gallery. Michael Iacovone’s panoramic photo-montages are concerned with real time and space; they chronicle the artist’s travels through downtown Washington, with jotted notes on moments and locations. Carly Witmer’s pictures, sometimes on shaped canvases, divide the spectrum into blocks of color, as if refracted through a prism.

Light, of course, is a longtime fascination of painters. Capturing the way it pools and gleams gives life to images that are in reality static. Witmer doesn’t simply depict white light as broken into its constituent hues. The Baltimore artist also divides the pictorial plane unexpectedly, notably in “Prismatic Paintings #12-13,” whose two spiraling pieces frame a central section of white wall. The conventionally rectangular “Prismatic Painting #5” achieves much the same effect, but with hot yellow and white paint at its core. The painting’s focal point pulses, yet also seems calm.

A sort of photographic cubist, Iacovone considers our town from multiple vantage points in the same run-on image. His “U Street” is a stroll divided into instants, with handwritten commentary on the places and times each frame was digitally exposed. “Logan Circle” is more of a pirouette, depicting various views outward from the center. The result is personal, since the D.C.

artist is showing Washington as he sees it. But it's also universal, because the lines and curves of L'Enfant's baroque street plan provide an experience of space for everyone — even those who never stop to notice it.

## **Michael Iacovone & Carly Witmer**

On view through June 5 at Heurich Gallery, 505 9th St. NW; 202-223-1626

## **Fear Strikes Back**

Here's one way to get gallery-goers' attention: include a simulated suicide-bomber vest in a show titled "Fear Strikes Back." Nick Collier's "VS.," which places the explosive garment next to an ammo vest, is just one of the conversation pieces in this District of Columbia Arts Center exhibition. The 13-artist array also includes Anna U Davis's picture of a mass suicide scene; Michele Colburn's very military-looking painting atop what turns out to a field of diapers; and Julia Kim Smith's photograph of a woman's chest, post-mastectomy.

Not all the work is so evocative of violence and loss, and some of the selections originally had a different context. Colby Caldwell's enlarged scan of a shotgun shell, for example, comes from his series on birds and bird hunting. David Carlson's video piece, "Five Minute God," mingles slices of people's faces as they talk about religion in multiple languages, prompting thoughts of affinity rather than conflict. While a straight razor features in Sam Christian Holmes's "Memories," which combines old photos with objects that relate to them, the series is more about memory than fear. And then there's David Page's huge metal model of tea cozy, inspired by the 450 people killed or injured annually in British tea cozy accidents. Sometimes, people find strangers's misfortunes more funny than terrifying.

## **Fear Strikes Back**

On view through June 2 at District of Columbia Arts Center, 2438 18th St. NW, 202-462-7833, [www.dcartscenter.org](http://www.dcartscenter.org)

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 **1 Comment**

