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Democracy Dies in Darkness

In the galleries: Disrupting and denaturing the concept of comfortable at home

By Mark Jenkins

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The natural and the man-made meet in Stephanie Garon's art, and the results aren't gentle. Some of the pieces in "(De)composition," the Baltimore artist's show at the District of Columbia Arts Center, are less encounters than collisions.

Several welded black-steel structures enclose a broken branch or a single large leaf. Dry and partly withered, the tree parts will continue to decay, much like the beet juice Garon mixes with charcoal to make the large abstract drawings that constitute the bulk of the exhibition. The steel boxes are far sturdier than the vegetal ingredients, yet open in form, so they define the found objects in space without fully containing them.

The contrast between organic and metallic is not the only tension in Garon's work; the artist also pits drawing against sculpture. The charcoal renderings are enclosed by steel casings that can become part of the composition. Metal bars emanate from the frames to slash across or curl around the picture plane, drawing 3-D lines that are mirrored by charcoal strokes. The opposition is vivid visually and packs a philosophical kick. Garon has choreographed a dance between transience and permanence.

Sketching and sculpting also merge in the work of Joanne Kent, whose little "Talismans" are in DCAC's tiny Nano Gallery. Most often, the D.C. artist constructs thick layers of pigment atop small rectangles of canvas, allowing tantalizing glimpses of differently hued lower levels. But the most talismanic of the pieces are three that are painted in neutral colors on near-squares of notched wood. Simple and mysterious, these "Mini-Etudes" have a primal allure.

Stephanie Garon: (De)composition and Joanne Kent: Talismans

Through March 22 and May 10, respectively, at the District of Columbia Arts Center, 2438 18th St. NW.