

ART OF LIVING

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Photos by Andy Coughlan/Beaumont Enterprise

An installation shot of “Dreams, Screams and Fantastical Things” on display at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas through Sept. 15.

Art museum puts on off-kilter summer show

By Andy Coughlan
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As summer begins to turn up the heat, the Art Museum of Southeast Texas traditionally delves into its permanent collection to offer a cool respite from the sun.

“Dreams, Screams and Fantastical Things,” on display through Sept. 15, showcases works from AMSET’s holdings of contemporary art. Curator Caitlin Clay said she selected works that are designed to unsettle the viewer. She has succeeded, but there is a wicked sense of humor present among the dark imagery.

Fans of the surreal will be delighted with the strange juxtapositions and grotesque images on display. While many of the pieces are thoughtfully disturbing, several others are humorous in their absurdity.

Terry Allen’s bronze bust “Smile” features a businessman with a smile that wraps fully around his head. His rows of teeth look like a zipper. His tie, a symbol of conformity, seems to be flying away from him. This satirical piece questions the shallowness. One imagines this salesman forced into the smile as he looks to close the deal. Does the tie represent a desire to break free, perhaps?

Two large paintings by Robert Jessup juxtapose fantasy elements into open landscapes. In each, a girl in a ballet-style outfit wrestles with an oversized something — a stuffed toy elephant or a gingerbread man. The colors are bright and whimsical, but why is that man shouting into the sky? Or that dog floating vertically? The bright execution of the works



Holly Lane’s “Then They Gazed Into The Pool” is part of “Dreams, Screams and Fantastical Things” on display at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas.

draw us in, but we are forced to look slightly askance as we examine

the images. In Shakespearean times, dreams were indis-

tinguishable from nightmares. “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” is certain-

ly not sweet and nice with its fairy manipulations and transmutation.

Walking into AMSET’s gallery is to enter a dream world.

Much of the work is familiar to regular visitors over the years with many artists represented by solo shows, including Julie Speed, Angelica Delfina Vasquez, Cruz, Steve Brudniak and more.

There are moments that allude to horror. Helen Altman’s “Untitled (Skulls #1-5)” are built from hay, birdseed and wire. They are stacked together like decomposing corpses in a mass grave. Larry Leach’s “Big Thicket Altar” is a dark triptych featuring a naked woman in a dark forest. Her flesh shines like a light in the darkness, but her face is obscured by foliage.

Holly Lane’s “Then They Gazed Into The Pool” is marvelously strange. A series of buffalo heads and shoulders are mounted on...what? Trees which are surely too slender to take the weight? Poles with webbed feet? Perhaps the clue is in the flamingo carved into the frame above the picture. The buffalos gaze lifelessly into the water where fish swim. There are also fish carved into the shelf below extending the picture to the frame. The painting is rendered in the style of traditional Western art, but this is no cowboy imagery that we have seen before.

“Dreams, Screams and Fantastical Things” is an odd show. It is off-kilter and well worth a visit. And there is just enough darkness to make one appreciate the bright summer sun.

The Art Museum of Southeast Texas is located at 500 Main St. in Beaumont. For more, visit amset.org.



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Helen Altman’s “Untitled (Skulls #1-5).”