

# Layering of ideas common thread in 3-person show

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Dispatch Art Critic

The stimulating exhibit "Visual Dialogues" at Gallery V challenges the eyes and the mind.

Works by three emerging artists — Kelly Dietrick, Christian J. Faur and Ron Johnson — at first seem to offer little possibility of creating a visual dialogue with one another.

Dietrick's work consists of canvas, painted with acrylic in "canvas color," stretched on small panels, with lines created with gold or colored thread stitched in meandering patterns.

Faur paints representational figures in oil on large canvases.

And Johnson favors graphite on glassine paper with the occasional minimal use of acrylic on strips of canvas for his nonobjective compositions.

But it does not take long to detect a similarity in the three artists' approaches to their work: They execute their images in layers, and they handle their materials to create a layering of ideas.

All of the artists indicate that the process of creation is most important to them. Accordingly, their works are finely crafted, making them a pleasure to behold even if the content is perplexing.

Dietrick's layering is the simplest and most obvious. She paints basic canvas in its original off-white shade, thus alluding to a blank canvas before the artist sets to work.

But instead of graphite or pigments, she uses gold or colored threads to machine-embroider a meandering line. The thickness of that line varies from solid to interrupted. But, however simple or complex the pattern that line creates, it clearly has a beginning and an end.

The pattern is obvious in *Atomic #79*, but not so much in *148 + 219 + 288*. But those who study the work will discover that it contains the pattern found in *Atomic #79*, the original piece in the series on display.

Dietrick's intention was to represent lines physically in three dimensions and illustratively in two dimensions. Interestingly, as viewers study the more complex patterns they seem to "see" a third dimension creeping into the images.

Faur's layering places a human figure, generally a child realistically interpreted,

in the foreground of an elusive space that seems to melt into infinity. The effect is one of isolation for the figure, which appears ready to step into the viewer's space to escape the mathematical and scientific symbols floating in the background. The background is beautifully luminous, rendered with application upon application of delicately pigmented oils and varnish, combined with stencil symbols.

While the little girl in *Autumn's Boundaries* appears to have just stepped out of the dream of the luminous background, the youngster in *Memory Strings* stands squarely in what seems to be a shallow recess, reluctant to come forward. Both images have a compelling quality that tends to reawaken viewers' long-forgotten childhood memories.

In his treatment of layers, Johnson seems to be challenging the traditional concept of drawing on paper or painting on canvas.

His main material is glassine, a strong, semitransparent paper, which he stretches on a frame. He makes graphite marks on sheets of glassine, which he stacks together.

The layering of semitransparent layers and the ambient light that plays with the glassine create an odd sense of nebulous space — somewhat like looking at shapes through a heavy haze.

In his other works, Johnson seems to be reinventing painting, conceiving it as three-dimensional, rather than a two-dimensional surface with pigments on it. In these works, glassine replaces the canvas, and the images are constructed within the shallow space created by the frame.

The images are built of strips of canvas painted in bright colors, which are exposed in the back of the work. From the front, the images are blurred — shadowy, tantalizing forms as in *Pretending To Recognize*.

In "... in the left," the hazy vertical lines shift as viewers move in front of the piece — the effect of ambient light again — to the point where the left strip disappears altogether.

Thanks to the fine craftsmanship of each piece, and to a sensitive presentation that carefully makes the most of the juxtaposition of the works, this is a most engaging — and elegant — show.



*Atomic #79* by Kelly Dietrick

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*Memory Strings* by Christian J. Faur