

Hope is the Thing with Feathers



Godwin-Ternbach Museum

Hope is the Thing with Feathers: A Curatorial Labor of Hope...and Love

Godwin-Ternbach Museum, Queens College until July 31st, 2019

By Jennifer Vignone for <http://www.NY-ARTNews.com>

The impressive thing about this exhibition is the unexpected juxtaposition of works. Pieces from different eras and diverse artists are brought together; it is not the typical approach to an exhibition. The curator, Louise Weinberg, seems to be telling us – look at this! – see it in a new light – break free from having to see just one point in time, from one artist or a few related artists – let your mind expand and wander. See relationships that you otherwise would not have known were there. Now see how this is reflected in your own world, in your own life. Look for and embrace the unexpected. See nature's impact on us throughout time, how our impact has been just as great, but not always for the better.

Like the poem for which the exhibition is named, Emily Dickinson's "Hope is the Thing with Feathers" takes you to the inner part of your mind where the hope of visual renewal (and perhaps more) is rekindled with a body of work that perhaps would not be appreciated as much if it had taken a more traditional approach. That is the "hope" the curator speaks of.

Ms. Weinberg relates:

"When charged with the challenge of curating an exhibition from the Godwin-Ternbach Museum's collection in essentially three months, it became clear that to be focused, I had to select works with a particular resonance for me. Then the task became how to organize this diverse compilation of works coherently, and at the same time, reveal specific themes under the broad umbrella of art of the natural world both historically and contemporaneously. "Hope is the Thing with Feathers: Art of the Natural World" presented a fortuitous teaching moment to examine pressing important concerns regarding climate change, habitat loss and extinction, and the indelible human impact on our global environment."

Pieces are brought together to highlight how art traverses time and mind. We pick up pieces of things and collect them in our mind and mostly never tap into them to see how they interrelate. For example, the selection entitled, "Micro Worlds/In the Garden" beautifully encapsulates the show's overall theme with works that depict nature from an 1830 watercolor by Japanese artist, Isoroku Itu, "Beetle Specimen" to Andy Warhol's 1964 serigraph, "Flowers", jumping to Donald Sultan's 1994 "Green Flowers", and ending with Korean artist, Min Kuong-Kap's "White Flower Against Large Leaves" of 2002. The associations of nature are clear and enjoyed in a new way, crossing time to see a renewed interplay of different media, visions, and interpretation.



Artist visions and interpretations across time and culture create associations that speak to the universal experience of art and its ability to communicate to each individual and time period. Expanding beyond this is Ms. Weinberg's desire to show how the curatorial experience creates new ways to see and learn about art and through art.

Left: Isoroku Itu, 1830, watercolor, "Beetle Specimen"
Right: Andy Warhol, 1964 serigraph, "Flowers"

Ms. Weinberg culled through hundreds of images from the Queens College archives. The result is the telling of a story of how art crosses time and culture and individual to become a creative and education force that enriches all of us if we are exposed to it. She has also conveyed another important aspect of what art curating and collecting is all about that makes this show even more powerful: she clearly loves these pieces. They are chosen and grouped with such care and consideration as she takes us along her journey that we can experience not just the works individually, but collectively, within their groupings as well as the overall experience.

Ms. Weinberg, conscientious and actively engaged in how we utilize our natural resources, explores the artist's view of human impact on nature. In her interpretation she uses a range of material, from historic prints of endangered and vanished birds by John James Audubon to the contemporary "Owed to Plants" by book artist Billy O'Callaghan.

The show is an opportunity in revealing relationships and building bridges across seeing, understanding, and appreciating the work, as well as showing the viewer how s/he is a part of it all – its relevance – as it is a part of not just a timeline in artworks, but a creative universe that speaks to each viewer as they receive it in their own personal space.

The show is at the Godwin-Ternbach Museum at Queens College until July 31st. If you have any interest in curating, it is a wonderful educational device for how a curator thinks and makes decisions and how important the notion of storytelling is to a successful exhibition as well as an indelible education experience.