

DOWNTOWNER

Trenton's City Paper | March 2013 | mercerspace.com

'More Than a Rug': textiles and sculpture

BY JOSEPH LONGINO

More Than a Rug, an exhibition set for the Trenton City Museum, will showcase an international variety of works by four area artists—three of the whom were born abroad—as well as African textiles and jewelry from the David Bosted collection.

Exhibitions at the Trenton City Museum at Ellarslie are curated by members of the Trenton Museum Society's Exhibits Committee on a rotating basis. With a show of African textiles and jewelry from the Bosted collection already scheduled for one of the three galleries on the main floor of the museum, I curated the other two galleries in a complementary manner.

The tapestries of Armando Sosa immediately came to mind, paired with the welded steel sculptures of John McDevitt in the second gallery. American-born McDevitt welds steel into emblems of self-transformation.

Sosa hand weaves his brilliantly colored tapestries of silk, mercerized cotton, and metallic threads. He works on two wooden looms he built himself, continuing an ancient craft rarely practiced today.

The tapestries incorporate images and icons of his native Guatemala, some dating back to his Mayan and pre-Columbian heritage and others to memories of a Central American childhood. Sosa's representational and abstract design motifs also reflect African textiles, European jacquard patterns, and Renaissance tapestry details.

Expanding on the textile theme, I thought of the scroll paintings bordered in silk by the late I-Hsiung Ju, paired with the carved stone sculptures of Ayami Aoyama in the third gallery.

I-Hsiung Ju worked in the tradition of hanging scroll paintings bordered in silk

of his native China. Central to this tradition is the fusion of painting, philosophy, and poetry evident in the contemplative stance of the artist toward nature, including the flora, fauna, and landscapes of both China and America.

Ju is unusual among Chinese artists in having successfully melded traditional and modern styles, techniques, and subjects. Though representational, the paintings are imaginative rather than literal depictions of scenes that often suggest a story.

Far from her native Japan, Ayami Aoyama carves stone to uncover the life waiting within, while Their works have in common a spirituality arising from the skill and vision of the sculptor in transcending resistant materials to shape objects of sensuous beauty. This sensuous shaping of a single, resistant material defines sculpture's great tradition, grounded in replicating the curvatures of the human body.

The abstract modernity of the sculptures of Aoyama and McDevitt complements the figurative traditionalism of the tapestries and scroll paintings.

On Sunday, March 24 at 2 p.m., Trenton Museum Society trustee David Bosted will give a gallery talk on African textiles, illustrated by items on display from his collection.

Trenton City Museum at Ellarslie, March 2 through April 19. The opening reception is scheduled for Saturday, March 9 from 7 to 9 p.m., members and artists only 6 to 7 p.m.

Joseph Longino is a published poet and art critic and member of the Exhibits Committee of the Trenton Museum Society. He is President of the Delaware Valley Poets, for which he conducts poetry workshops, and has taught writing and literature at Georgia State and Georgia Tech Universities in Atlanta.