

PLACES OF THE HEART:

Hess Gallery
Pine Manor College
400 Heath Street
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

PRILLA SMITH BRACKETT

Through December 1

Mixed media artist Prilla Smith Brackett intends her translucent, conceptual landscape images to be anything but a literal delineation of a familiar place. This show, which contains 28 of her artworks, is an ephemeral invitation for viewers to indulge in their own contemplation; her contextual narrative is revealingly personal, yet universal in appeal.

In her forests: trees, copse, boles split by lightning, saplings and coarse woody debris strewn about — they are primordial, pristine and pure. Some would say old growth forests are greater than any cathedral in its homage to God. “Forests are places of hidden secrets, of solace and spirituality, of make-believe,” Brackett said. “I hope to create spaces where the imagination can wander and memories can surface.” Generations come and go, while

these magnificent trees stand, rooted, bearing silent witness to humanity’s progress and, also, to our collusive encroachment and disregard for inducing environmental travesties. Due to this disregard, an activist’s prominent drumbeat has reverberated in Brackett’s work for the last 15 years.

Nowadays, drawing from this cautionary tale and from a childhood spent wide-eyed, exploring the woods, the images of New England forest landscape continue to dominate as her subject matter. The natural landscape images in her mixed media work come from photographs she snapped while on an extended solo hiking trip to the Big Reed Reserve in the White Mountains in northern Maine in 1995. She further embeds and superimposes images of furniture salvaged from the sale of her ancestral home in Duxbury, Massachusetts; they brim with 90 years of generational memories for her.

Brackett’s personal vocabulary poignantly reflects that which has come from the forest, with passing time, shall return to the forest — that all things physical and spiritual shall reunite.

Within the landscape envelope, the images and the scale of these cherished furnishings are placed much like an overlaying pattern, so their dysphoric symbolism is clear — they sit, lean and hover; sometimes outlined, sometimes opaque, at times translucent, thus disappearing into the forest like ghostly images.

She alludes to an antique rocking chair, bed and bureau as characters in her narrative that intrude into the primordial forest setting as revenant icons: a disquietude contrasting what is man-made with what is natural.

Brackett, whose work can be found in several local college collections as well as the National Museum of Women in the Arts, wants her viewers to ponder what immanent and harvested interconnections exist in their own life, and to consider what community action should take place to protect and to preserve the environment.

Her monoprints and mixed-media panels vary in size. They range from a small 19¾” X 22¼” to a large six-panel piece, “Family Patterns #8,” measuring 9 feet high by 8 feet wide. She often uses a combination of acrylic wash, graphite, conté, charcoal, oil pastel and collaged paper on panels. In this richly textured piece, a wide section of a blown-down tree with protruding branches takes on the appearance of the tentacles of a monstrous insect. They serve to make the point, Brackett said, that “Forests are scary places on the edge of civilization.”

For this reviewer, “Places of the Heart” is about the air we breathe, the soil we till, the trees, the horizon and what we think of life itself.



Family Patterns #3, 2010, graphite, Cretacolor, acryla gouache on paper.