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THE DENVER POST

Denver's Rule Gallery connects art to nature — and Astro Turf

By Ray Mark Rinaldi, December, 2015

Good art comes in small packages at Rule. The gallery remains a refreshingly humble, single-room operation in a RiNo neighborhood that seems to get louder and busier with each passing week.

Rule keeps its shows modest and its quality high. As a dealer, the operation has a very deep bench of talent, but it parses objects out to the public in doses that are easy to digest and appreciate.

“Gone Green,” the current group exhibit, is Rule at its most charming. It’s a sampling, really, just 21 pieces by seven artists whose work is pulled together by its connection to flora and fauna. Rule underscores the theme by carpeting its floor with a layer of AstroTurf and by installing one of artist Jim Green’s sound pieces. His “Birds” chirp and coo in the background — not too serious, but enough to transform the place into a warm destination for a chilly winter afternoon.

There are other familiar names in the mix here, each well-represented: An acrylic painting by Nathan Abels depicting the skeleton of some antlered animal decomposing gracefully into the surrounding wilderness; one of Jason DeMarte’s elegant photo collages bringing birds, flowers and insects together into a cloudy and romantic landscape.

Rule also imports Jenny Sharaf from Los Angeles for this outing. She frames vintage photos from nature magazines and layers on top of the wooded scenes controlled flows of latex house paint. It’s a provocative bit of blobbing that overrides the organic ooze of nature with something more human and intentional.



The show’s best strength, though, comes from its newcomers, lesser-known artists such as Suchitra Mattai, Caryn Keffer and William Dalton Frizzell, who easily hold their own.

Keffer is right with the times, commenting on Colorado’s newest commodity by purchasing various buds of marijuana and casting them in resin. Her multi-colored chunks of artificial weed double as objects that can be stored in small medicine jars or connected to hardware and worn as jewelry.

Mattai offers two varieties of her wares. She fills fancy china teacups with plastic dioramas of nature gone awry. There's something precious about her delicate little worlds, until you notice the ducks and cattle in peril from pollutants.

Just as interesting are her interventions on vintage needlepoint scenes recycled from thrift stores. She sews right on top of the fabric-based pieces, interrupting their muted palates and serene country scenery with bright-colored thread, altering the time, place and geometry of the original.

Frizzell has just one entry, but it's the most interesting. The conceptual piece has him commissioning a Native American weaver to create a 6-foot-by-3-foot rug identical to the popular bumper sticker that features the word "NATIVE" over a silhouette of mountain peaks that resemble the state license plate.

The bumper sticker, of course, is a point of pride for second and third generation Coloradans, but Dalton's introduction of a truly native hand rewrites the entire meaning, posing the question: Who's the real native here?

"Gone Green" is a user-friendly show and not just because the art is interesting. Rule has adapted its business model lately to make sure it offers work at multiple price points, something that would make other galleries a lot more fun to visit. There's no obligation to buy at galleries; they just want to show off their stuff. But with prices starting at \$80 and going to \$7,500, this one makes a purchase possible, no matter how much green you arrive with.

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GONE GREEN

Rule Gallery's current group show runs **through Jan. 30**. 3254 Walnut St. **Free**. 303-800-6776 or rulegallery.com.