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# Westword

## Review: Landmark MoP Shows Michael Warren, RULE Gallery

Michael Paglia / April 3, 2019



Two photos by Renluka Maharaj (left and in right), and one by Susan Blake (center) at Rule Gallery

The ongoing success of the biennial Month of Photography is astounding. Since it debuted in 2004, MoP just gets stronger and stronger with each iteration. Founder Mark Sink has said he'll be less involved in 2021, but his relentless push through tireless advocacy has already taken it very far. Working independently from one another, artists, curators and galleries all make significant contributions to the whole in this

year's iteration. There are so many photo-related shows in town right now, seeing them equates to an informal master's degree in contemporary photography.

At Rule Gallery is another group show by a trio of photographers who all create images of enigmatic scenes involving cloth in some way, which partly explains the exhibit's title: *In the Fold*.

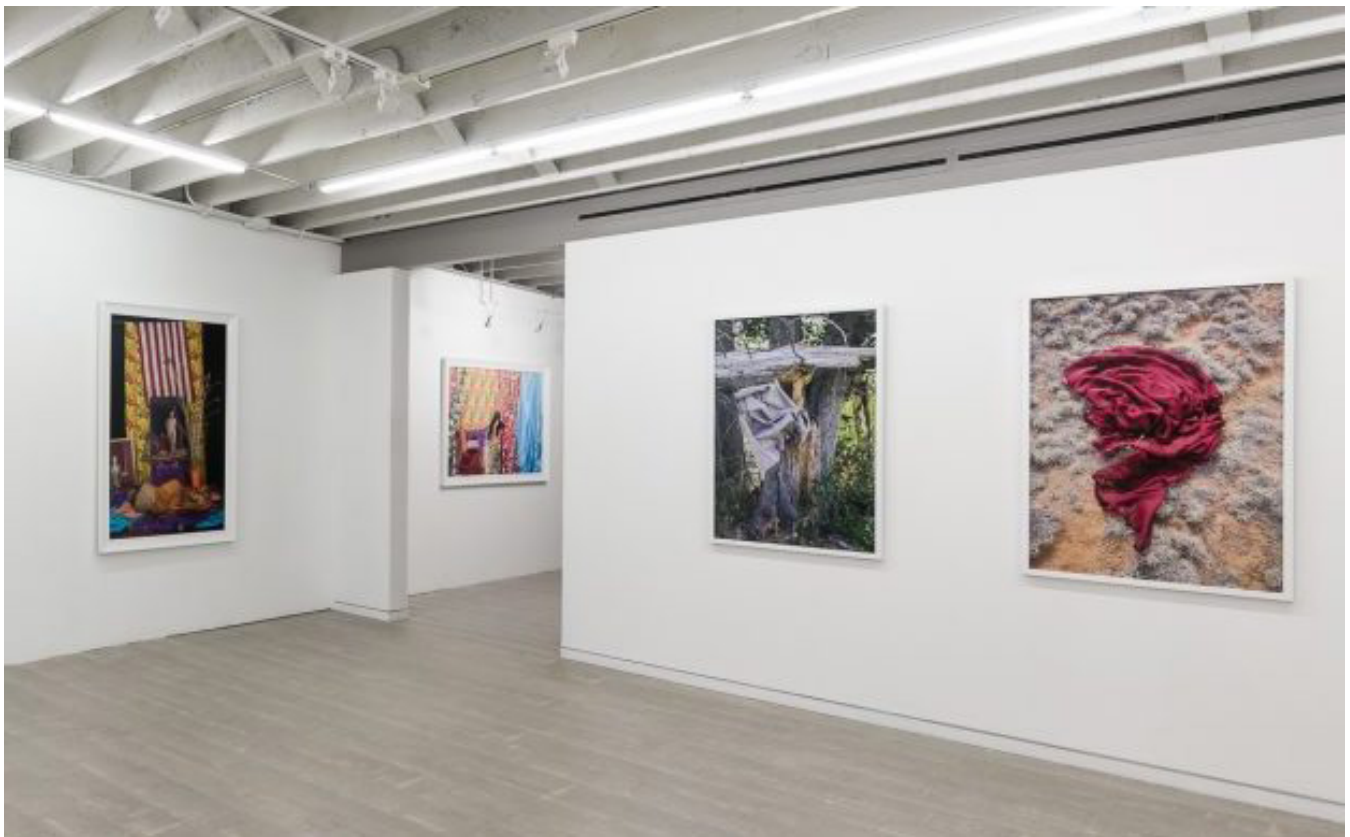


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The first of the three is **Renluka Maharaj**, a native of Trinidad and Tobago who lives part of the year in Colorado and earned her undergraduate degree at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her work is staged, typically concerns her own life, and raises issues related to race, history and gender. She addresses otherness in a pigmented ink print, "Why So Foreign, Why So Strange," which depicts her draped in a coral-colored head scarf set within a sea of representations of flowers: floral wallpaper in the background, artificial bouquets in the foreground. Maharaj is also interested in depicting a subtle eroticism; "Purple Mountain Majesties" is a still life with two photos, one of a figure in bondage and the other a live, semi-nude model — Maharaj herself? — partly covered in luxurious sari fabric. Her photos exude a mysterious aura, and the viewer is perhaps not meant to fully understand the photographer's intention.

**Susan Blake**, who lives in Denver, offers simpler and less elaborately staged photos, but they are akin visually to Maharaj's aesthetic. Blake's images depict pieces of cloth set in the natural environment, and this small intervention of cloth in the landscape addresses a couple of topics at once. It refers back to the use of drapery in Old Master paintings, a common feature of portraits and history paintings alike, but displaces it by inserting the cloth in the scenery. Though inanimate, the cloth also introduces the human figure — not necessarily in shape, but conceptually — into the landscape. In "Co-Evolutionary," for example, a lace tablecloth hangs from the bare branches of a shrub, and looks like a standing person; in "Tainted by Desire," a swirl of scarlet fabric against the ground spotted with desert grasses evokes a reclining one.



Two photos by Renluka Maharaj, and two by Susan Blake at "In the Fold" at Rule Gallery



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Basil Kincaid is as much about the fabrics as he is the photos. He lives in St. Louis but studied at Colorado College, and his photos offer poetic takes on identity, specifically African-American identity. The setting for "Birth by Fire" is a burnt-out husk of an urban house, where a male model is almost completely covered by a quilt. Kincaid sees quilts as harking back to his own ancestors, as well as referencing black folk-art traditions. The pieces of fabric in the quilt are gathered from sources in his neighborhood, as well as from people around the world with whom he connects on social media.

Kincaid is also represented by an actual quilted wall sculpture, which might seem strange in a photo show. Some of the patterns on the fabrics that make up the piece have been printed with digital reproductions of photos, however, so there's a connection. The patterns he creates are based on digital photos of his environment.

These three photographers are coming from totally different directions — Maharaj exploring her own psyche, Blake riffing on art history, and Kincaid exploring the African-American experience — so it's intriguing that they've created work with such closely aligned aesthetic sensibilities.

The abundance of photography shows in town right now serves as an ironic reminder of how few shows are dedicated to photography, the foundational medium of our time, the rest of the year. Fortunately, the Month of Photography extends well beyond its opening month, so there is still plenty to see.

"In the Fold" open March 22 - May 4, 2019  
RULE Gallery, 530 Santa Fe Drive,  
303-800-6776 or [rulegallery.com](http://rulegallery.com)



Photos bracket a quilt, all by Basil Kincaid at "In the Fold" at Rule Gallery