

## Galleries

# Mosaic of Place And Perspective

By Lee Fleming  
Special to The Washington Post

Argentine artists Mely Gomez and Ana Erman do not produce works in collaboration, yet the ease with which their sculpture and paintings share Gallery 10's space suggests otherwise. Erman's brooding "Fragmentos" of acrylic on canvas and paper are abstract explorations of the grid, arrow and other hieroglyphs. One can discern pre-Columbian patterns beneath the layers of earth-brown, red and black floating through the taut red grid lines—a tribute, perhaps, to Erman's Latin heritage. Yet her paintings also pursue issues of perspective and illusionism, as she uses the grid to focus the eye on the foreground, then subtly shifts its angles to create the outlines of shapes that recede into cloudy space.

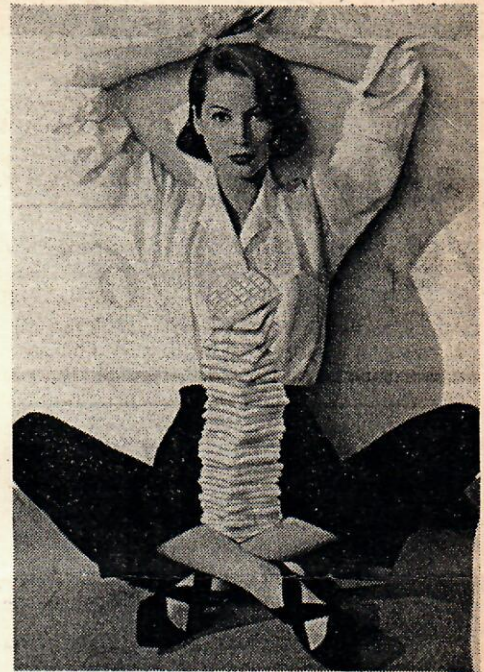
Gomez's small wall reliefs are technical sleights of hand whose painted, textured surfaces complement Erman's stained, expressionist brushwork. More important, this "skin" conceals and makes precious the Styrofoam material that Gomez carves and scumbles to imply everything from mosaic tablets to aerial topography. Her layering of paint is especially subtle. "CIV," for example, sets white-gray slabs converging on a bubbling, receding center, as if the lower end of a glacier were turning into a whirlpool of choppy ice. In "CXI," the whites are clearer, masking blushes of orange and yellow—dawn light imprisoned beneath snow-covered Arctic ice. Indeed, however abstract the form, Gomez's sculptures evoke the elusive qualities of weather—stormy, occasionally red-hot, and frequently fascinating.

## 'Power Inside-Out' at DCAC

In "The White Goddess," poet Robert Graves culled myth and history to support his vision of the Goddess as man's ideal muse—a combination of beautiful maiden, loving mother and wise woman-hag. The 33 works in "Walk the Goddess Walk: Power Inside-Out" also explore individual aspects of this female power figure, from nurturer to destroyer. But though individual pieces have power, overall the show fails to deliver any epiphanies about the role or perception of women in society.

Would that it were otherwise, because curator Alison Maddex has a good eye, even if it frequently allows rehashes of styles and subjects put forth by pioneer critic-practitioners of gender-conscious art, such as Ree Morton, Nancy Spero, Cindy Sherman, Alexis Smith and Victor Burgin. Still, there are a number of pieces worth a visit, especially two Reuven Kuperman paintings of nudes—in a brushy reinterpretation of high mannerist style—that hang like banners above the stairwell. These are an art historian's nightmare of feminine power unleashed, with allusions to overblown baroque nudes and still lifes. "Still Life #11," in which a woman grovels over/protects a spill of fruits and vegetables on the floor, is a bit literal in making the point that women's bounty-giving is often a reductive role. But in "Still Life #7," the woman holds a knife to her throat while extending a plate of carefully painted pears—actually a plaque collaged onto the canvas, while swashes of paint suggest wings. The result is a satisfying embodiment of destructive, nurturing and angelic traits.

In Manon Cleary's "Mystery Series #5," two nude women in a Pompeian-red room bend in mysterious ritual over a bleached skull. The luminescent skin tones and



Alison Maddex's "Waffler" depicts woman as provider, satisfier of appetites and anything else you can think of.

unnerving watery light demonstrate again why Cleary is considered the best figurative painter around. And Joey-Michelle Hutchison's sculptures, while recalling their '70s and '80s ancestors, show promise: The contrast of the rough wooden casing and satiny padded interiors—producing objects reminiscent of coffins, sedan chairs, wig boxes and dog baskets—proves she is not afraid to go for weird beauty and sensual effect. Upgrading the complexity of ideas in the texts decorating her surfaces should come next.

## 'Fantasy Furniture' at Parish

The title, "Once Upon a Time There Was Fantasy Furniture—by Bodil," sums up the shortcomings of this show. The cast-off furniture reclaimed and redeemed through paint and ornament by Bodil Meloney tends to veer into terminal cuteness. Past work has shown that Meloney is capable of lean-lined sculpture; here, the result of her reclamations too often suggests well-meaning handicraft rather than serious art, where the whimsical is balanced by compositional concerns.

There are exceptions: "Tale of a Scarlet Bird" juxtaposes the fluid lines of branches against the rigid structure of the chair, and the red bird and fledglings positioned on the boughs avoid kitschiness. "Coral Key" is the high point. Meloney treats the chair seat as a vitrine-aquarium, loading it with carved and painted fish, starfish and driftwood.

The furniture is accompanied by works on paper that have a seriousness at odds with the furniture. A series of black-and-white works replete with masks, harlequins, nude women, doves and babies suggests a grappling with psychological death and rebirth—themes with far more power than the thrift store make-overs that are the main event.

**Meetings: Fragments—Mely Gomez and Ana Erman, at Gallery 10, 1519 Connecticut Ave. NW, through Sept. 25.**  
**Walk the Goddess Walk: Power Inside-Out, at the District of Columbia Arts Center, 2438 18th St. NW., through Sept. 19.**  
**Once Upon a Time There Was Fantasy Furniture—by Bodil, at Parish Gallery, 1054 31st St. NW (courtyard), through Sept. 11.**