

The Berkshire Eagle

Step inside Gildersleeve's work

New exhibit at Cynthia-Reeves Gallery gives backstory of artists' work



The Cynthia-Reeves Gallery in North Adams is featuring Allison Gildersleeve's exhibit "In The Retelling," on view now through Nov. 3.

GILLIAN JONES -THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

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ON EXHIBIT

What: Allison Gildersleeve's "In the Retelling"

When: On view now through Nov. 3

Where: Cynthia-Reeves Gallery, 1315 Mass MoCA Way, North Adams

Information: www.cynthia-reeves.com, 413-398-5257

By John Seven, Eagle Correspondent

For Brooklyn-based artist, Allison Gildersleeve, a new show at the Cynthia-Reeves Gallery in North Adams is a chance not just to show her recent work in a gallery setting, but to invite viewers inside it.

"The The Retelling," on view now through Nov. 3, will be about more than showing her paintings. It's also about revealing her process, and in doing so, examining the way memory works. It's a new way of working for Gildersleeve, one that doesn't focus on the end product and one that even downplays the importance of the images she displays.

"It's not so much about the images themselves, but how we see and how our memory works and how we pay attention and how things come together," Gildersleeve said. "And so, I'm taking these recognizable sources. But it's more how our mind would put those fragments together and in what catches our attention and what slips away."

Gildersleeve compares the presentation of the work to creating collage, or turning the gallery into a sketchbook and, in some ways, revealing her studio secrets.

"For this installation, I'm putting out my source material and the steps that I take from the source to the paintings, it's all going to be out on display," Gildersleeve said.

Typically, Gildersleeve has a collection of photos that she takes of different things and places that interest her. She builds on this image bank that she said comprises her visual vocabulary and then later uses some of them as sources for simple ink drawings. Those pieces are then used as the inspiration for larger pieces of painting and collage.

"I never look at the photos and try to transcribe that photograph," said Gildersleeve. "It's really just a trigger. It's just that moment when an object in the outside world triggers a thought."

Gildersleeve lets those drawings pile up, she said, and then pulls from that pile for paintings. The purpose of the process is reflected in the show's title, an allusion to ideas as something repeatable, but constantly changing as they are passed on, making it not just a xerox-perfect copy of the original, but something alive, in the moment, reflective of the circumstance of each new iteration. The idea is that your memory is not the original happening, but a record of each time you remember it.

"Each time you retell something, that shapes your experience and that becomes your memory," said Gildersleeve. "So each time it's getting translated and transforming. The narratives build up and transform as they accumulate."

Many of Gildersleeve's images are inspired by a house in Connecticut that her parents owned and which she lived in for decades, and by a Vermont fishing camp of her great-grandfather's. Her parents' house was sold, but the camp is still a place she visits. Their real significance in her work is as measures of memory places that she witnessed change and brought her own change to as she witnessed it.

"I'm in these certain places constantly at the same time every year," Gildersleeve said. "But my life keeps changing around that and every time I go, something different has happened. And it's tying that consistency with all the change that happens in your life."

Gildersleeve notes that the Vermont camp has been occupied by the same family across generations, and this offers the sense of collected history in her own perception. So the images inspired by it traverse perceived decades of memories melding with those in the instant she takes a photograph, and each artistic progression following that, even though it may capture something that never moves along in the space it inhabits.

"There are certain things about it that remind me of the books that we put on the bookshelf and then they never change," Gildersleeve said, "or the piece of driftwood you find and you've put on the bookshelf and it stays there for 70 years and nobody changes it, as opposed to your kitchen table, which is this constant change of conversation and other stuff. "

This show gives Gildersleeve the chance to not only translate her ideas into spatial terms, but offer a viewer the chance to experience the ideas by being inside them, perhaps even functioning as their own figure in the painting, something that is typically missing from Gildersleeve's work because she doesn't want to anchor the narratives in her paintings to human figures.

"I want the viewer to be inside them and be moving around within them and sort of find their own stories within them. It's about me being inside these landscapes and then I'm hoping the viewer also enters these landscapes — inside my sketchbook and inside my world and moving around within it."