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Brian Shannon and Christy Wyckoff at Alysia Duckler Gallery

Although their work is very different, as artists Brian Shannon and Christy Wyckoff have several things in common. Both are on the faculty at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, both are mid-career, well-respected artists and both are primarily printmakers. Wyckoff finds unending source material for his work—graphically realistic paintings and inkjet prints—in the dry, stony terrain, the rock formations and desert plants of his native eastern Oregon. Shannon, who produces conceptually based installations and sculptures as well as prints, prefers simplified shapes or abstractions as references to natural and man-made forms. In his new work he used the geometry of architecture as a conceptual base for intaglio prints featuring hard-edged, single shapes. In the two bodies of works, visitors were presented with a study of contrasts in aesthetics, style and subject matter. There is, however, a shared underlying thematic context, not readily visible, which can be detected.

Two of Wyckoff's large paintings of sun-washed landscapes depict the approach and entrance to the Deschutes River Canyon in eastern Oregon. In *Talus*, early morning sunlight has turned the rise in the foreground to a pinkish blue with the rocky palisades in the back-



ground taking on darker mixes of colors. Stronger light in *Oxbow* contrasts the sandy arid land and a white stretch of road leading across it into the canyon with the high, dark rock formations of the canyon walls. The view in *Juniper* is outside the canyon, focusing on a close view of a dying tree at the edge of the flowing Deschutes River. Its trunk, looking as ancient, gnarled and furrowed as a dinosaur's neck, curves upward, supporting small branches still bearing a bit of foliage. The attention Wyckoff has given

it indicates the tree's condition and fate. Behind, the green grasses and blue rushing water signify the promise of renewal in nature's cycle of growth and decay.

If the paintings appear to have the realism of a photograph, it's because they began in the camera. Although like all artists of his age, Wyckoff was trained in the BC era (Before Computers), he now applies electronic tools to his work. All but one of the paintings here were based on a photographic composite of the subject, scanned into the computer, manipulated, then printed to serve as references. The one exception, *Bear Creek*, is a small, loosely painted, abstract interpretation of the creek's rough water and was painted on-site. Its spontaneity and painterliness indicate not only the artist's love of the eastern Oregon land, but also a basic drive to involve one's hand and eye in the act of creation.

A large inkjet print, *Mastodon*, is based on the same subject-area as the paintings and demonstrates the potential of the computer to produce highly individualized prints. The image of a tree's spread of small branches and twigs fills the picture plane. Through the bare branches, a long slope down to the river below can be seen. The precise detail, the muted colors and the thin black line that outlines each interlacing branch and tiny twig acknowledge the print's close relationship to Photoshop, but, more importantly, Wyckoff's choices in programming heighten a sense of atmosphere. Shannon's color prints, all executed by traditional intaglio processes, begin with recognizable subject images that reflect the mathematics upon which architectural design is based. Flat and diagrammatic, they resemble geometric motifs. The simple images, all printed in two or three tones of the same color, are taken from designs originating in classical architecture. Two prints, *Flute I* and *Flute II*, show sections of a column. One, predominantly green, is a cross section showing the flat top of the section as a circle with scalloped edges. The other, in blues, is a volumetric side view. *Cinquefoil*, printed in browns ranging from golden to sepia, comes from

the five-sided flower-like design used for stained glass windows. In *Interlace* Shannon extends the image to the edges of the paper creating the suggestion of a colonnade. The composition is dominated by overlapping semicircles, a design that comes from arch construction. Defined as "interlacing," it requires each end to be anchored in a column capital. The image, printed in greens, includes three capitals with dissimilar designs that support the arches. In *Interlace*, as well as in all other prints in this group of ten, the image is placed against a background employing softground to produce a dense abstract pattern.

As Wyckoff did, Shannon contributed one piece outside the thematic context of the main group. A black and



Above: Brian Shannon, *Interlace*, intaglio, 18" x 27"; below: Christy Wyckoff, *Juniper*, oil on wood, 27" x 66", at Alysia Duckler Gallery, Portland.

white print titled *Trestle*, it's a lively mix of crisscrossing heavy black lines inspired by the old wooden trestles of abandoned rail lines still dotting the Oregon countryside.

Both Shannon's and Wyckoff's bodies of work are inherently humanistic. Wyckoff's use of landscape is inspired by his interest in life cycles in all of nature. In much of Shannon's work he explores the innate human endeavor to find order in nature and to produce order in constructions and systems. Both make use, at different times, of abstract and representational forms. Both are expert technicians producing faultlessly finished pictures. In fact, in the work that was exhibited in this show, the pieces' formal beauty outweighed emotional and sensual appeal. The exceptions, Wyckoff's *Bear Creek* and Shannon's *Trestle*, suggest possibilities for a different emphasis in their next projects.

—Lois Allan

Brian Shannon and Christy Wyckoff: *New Work* closed in April at Alysia Duckler Gallery, Portland.

Lois Allan is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.