

The Quiet Pull of the 'Bader Fund' Show

By **Michael O'Sullivan**

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Every year since 2002, the Franz and Virginia Bader Fund has been quietly handing out grants -- now totaling \$185,000 -- to mid-career artists who live within 150 miles of the District. Established in accordance with the will of Virginia Bader, the late widow of longtime Washington art dealer and art-book peddler Franz Bader, the grants (typically \$15,000 each) are intended to foster the abilities of artists older than 40 to devote themselves more fully to their art.

Now, almost as quietly as the money has been handed out, a small exhibition has been organized around the work of the first seven artists to receive the award. Featuring a few pieces each by 2002 winners Kevin MacDonald and Scott Noel, 2003 winners Alex Kanevsky and Susan Moore, and 2004 winners Steven Kenny, Charles Ritchie and Yuriko Yamaguchi, the show could be seen as a belated attempt to bring a little more public attention to the prize and its recipients, whose work seems habitually to have received less publicity than, say, that of the winners of the Trawick Prize or the Bethesda Painting Awards, both of which feature annual showcases devoted to the competitions' finalists.

Unlike those showcases, however, which have tended to include sometimes edgy work, "The Franz and Virginia Bader Fund: Artists of the First Three Years" is a pretty sedate show, featuring artists working almost entirely representationally. The lone exception is talented local sculptor Yamaguchi, whose art is known for its quiet, almost hermetic symbolism. Here, she's represented by two works: a wall of half-biomorphic, half-calligraphic shapes in translucent resin called "Metamorphosis/Transient" and a cloudlike ball of copper wire and resin bead-forms titled "Web #8." Part of a series, the latter evokes both the unknowability of the human brain and the World Wide Web.

Of the other artists, whose work ranges from Kenny's tight surrealism to Kanevsky's brushy renderings of a fish, an apple tree and a female figure, the late MacDonald of Silver Spring stands out, and not merely because the show is dedicated to him, as a memorial of his death last year from cancer at age 59. Although you might want to call his work sedate, it's nowhere near sleepy.

Spare and unhurried -- to use the words of artist, teacher and critic Janis Goodman, whose review of the artist's work on WETA television is featured on a gallery computer -- MacDonald's two prints and one painting inspired by the architecture and angst of suburbia seem to throb with an otherworldly power. In unpopulated streetscapes, such as the oil-on-paper "Mysteries (of Silver Spring) Girls Portion," which

memorializes the now-vanished strip mall at Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue, MacDonald creates empty stage sets wherein the dramas of our own subconscious fears and desires play out.

Having grown up mere miles from the site of "Mysteries," and having known the artist, I find special resonance in MacDonald's work, including the more generic houses depicted in the silkscreens "Memoria Suburbiae" and "Suburban Apotheosis." Still, there is a pull that is, I think, universal in these meditations on memory, longing and loss.

A similar pull can be felt in Ritchie's works, especially the two small drawings identified as -- but not immediately obvious as -- self-portraits. Gradually, it becomes apparent that the images are reflections in windows. Bits of the frame are visible, as are half-glimpsed objects in the interior, but only dimly the artist himself. Like MacDonald's work, the built environments around us seem meant to be read as stand-ins for our own theatrically shadowed psyches.

THE FRANZ AND VIRGINIA BADER FUND: ARTISTS OF THE FIRST THREE YEARS Through Jan. 26 at the Luther W. Brady Art Gallery, George Washington University Media and Public Affairs Building, second floor, 805 21st St. NW (Metro: Foggy Bottom-GWU). 202-994-1525.
<http://www.gwu.edu/~bradyart>. Open Tuesday-Friday 10 to 5.

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Group exhibition at George Washington University, Washington, DC

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2007/01/12/the-quiet-pull-of-the-bader-fund-show/a435397a-71ea-4253-accf-becea445a501/>