

NATURE VIVE AND NATURE MORTE

Trustman Gallery, Simmons College • Boston, MA • simmons.edu/trustman • Through November 8, 2012

Nature vive and nature morte are translated as “nature alive” and “nature dead,” but nature morte is also the French term for the English *still life*.

Americans appear to be reluctant to talk about death or see it shown in art. In the Victorian era, death was a staple in literary and artistic representations but sex was seldom directly a focus, necrophilia aside. In modern and contemporary times, sex is culturally omnipresent, but death lately has become a taboo subject, an unnatural surprise requiring on-scene grief counselors. Overtly in Warhol’s *Disasters*, Leon Golub, and select others, and despite an often spectacular portrayal in documentary photography internationally, we rarely confront mortality in the US.



Brenda Star, *Banana Peels*, 2012, site-specific installation.

This exhibition features four artists whose themes relate openly to nature, alive and dead. Each subjective approach is expressed through individual choice of media and techniques. Mary O’Malley uses metallic ink and mixed media. *The One and the Many* is a semiabstract composition, like an Oriental altar bearing natural elements (actual branches) and drawn lines. It evokes a gathering of Asiatic deities, immortals in a natural setting, and eternal/ephemeral mingling.

Mary Dondero’s media are photography and sumi ink. Her naturalistic photographs of imprisoned blossoms refer to the brevity of their flowering. In *Gratitude*, she shows a rosebud confined by stitches as if to hold back its inevitable decay and death. A sumi ink drawing, *5 a.m.*, captures the short-lived early morning dew in a forest.

Constanze Kirmse makes abstract landscapes in acrylic and oil pastel. Some, like *Von der Hoh*, use an aerial view that may be derived from her mountain-climbing views. The site is kept ambiguous: the tones might represent a coastal scene or a pathway through terrain. Here, as in other landscapes, there is prominent use of black, suggesting mortality or possible danger.

Brenda Star’s site-specific installation using dried banana peels seems to apply her conflicted attitudes toward death directly to the wall. The blackened skins of fruits formerly associated with nourishment and life take on the character of Chinese calligraphy. Their patterns have meanings that are suggestive, yet finally indecipherable.

Altogether this group show, curated by faculty artist and gallery director Bridget Lynch, provides an unsettling dimension to the representation of mortality and its varied perceptions.

—Alicia Faxon