

# PREVIEW



## MONSTERS AT THE AIRPORT

STORY-THEMED EXHIBIT TAPS INTO ARTISTS' IMAGINATION./12

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## COVER STORY

# PURSUIING MEANING DOWN VARIED ROADS

“Chasing the Tale” exhibit spotlights art that carries narrative

By William Jaeger

“Chasing the Tale” might also have been called, with another obvious pun, “The Art of Storytelling.” All seven artists at the Airport Gallery have inventive characters at their core of their work, and these characters add to a larger narrative behind the scenes.

It’s a great idea for a breezy, likable, show. And it makes room for some fresh art, and some good art, that rises up in the company of peers.

The wall of nearly 100 small cartoon-like, layered, compacted, and often scary drawings of figures by Fernando Orellana take us far, quickly. Drawn from observation in bars and coffee shops, each reveals something about the artist’s interpretation of humanity, with his “people” looking ready to devour each other, or to multiply limbs and heads into deformed monsters.

This vision becomes more intense and complicated in his two larger works in the same vein, rambunctious and energized by raw line work. Details emerge that are puzzling, like roller skates. In many of Orellana’s pieces you’ll see crosses standing up at head level in an unexplained symbolism.

This kind of devious playfulness is continued in the saturated small paintings by Jason Blue Lake Hawk Martinez. Cheerful colors and Native American decorative motifs are countered by darker elements: clouds

with probing fingers, an unhappy sun, a hole in the ground with a ladder inviting you in. In contrast to Orellana, who sticks to redundant themes throughout, Martinez creates a growing vocabulary of symbolism in a host of strange scenes that keep you moving. Both artists seem to be saying that our everyday world can turn unfriendly if you stare long enough.

These works might sound like they are coming from a genre of applied art, pure illustration, where drawings are captive to outside ideas. But most of the works in “Chasing the Tale” are unencumbered. Whatever the narratives, it’s clear these artists are in charge of their own fates, making up their own scenarios. A case in point is the group of 12 deceptively simple, tiny paintings of creatures in the “Coyote” series by Gerda van Leeuwen. Look closely.

Even when the characters are not wholly original, as

with the black-and-white characters by Kenny Harris, the final ideas are. Harris takes known figures from mythology as well as characters lifted straight from book illustration (Maurice Sendak, for one), and makes little cutout versions that stand up as two-dimensional replicas. He then groups them in crowds on shelves or Plexiglas stands, making the viewer mix and equate their importance. In some small, sly way we start to see how archetypes are born, propelling the allegories that made them famous.

It’s when you get to the apparent genius of Amy Podmore that the show really dazzles.

## If you go

### “Chasing the Tale”

- **Where:** Albany International Airport Gallery, Colonie
- **When:** Through Feb 26, 2018
- **Hours:** 7 a.m.-11 p.m. daily
- **Admission:** Free
- **Info:** <http://albanyairport.com/art/albany-international-airport-gallery> or 518-242-2241

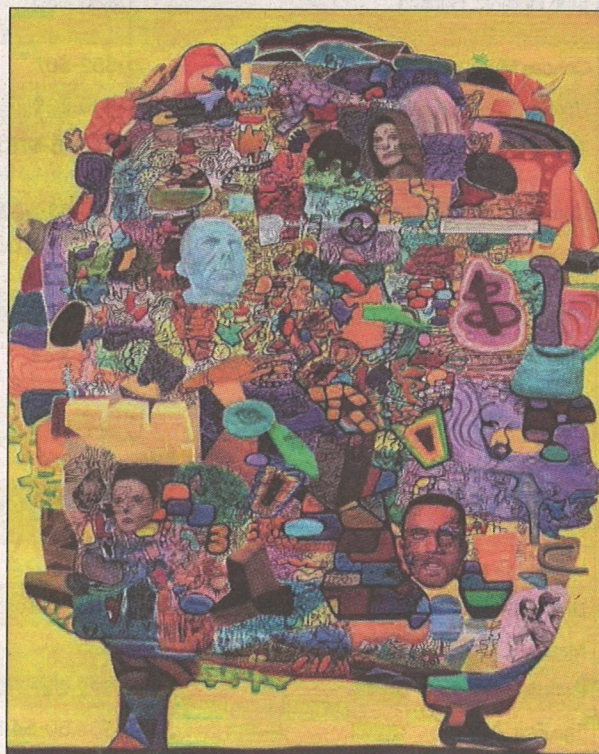


Photo courtesy the artist  
Jeff Starr’s “Le Freak” (2014, acrylic, oil, ink on linen).



Photo by  
Arthur Evans  
Amy Podmore’s  
“Untitled (figure  
with feet),” (2017,  
mixed media).



Photo by Arthur Evans

Below, Fernando Orellana's "The Popular Panic" (2017, oil pastel on board).

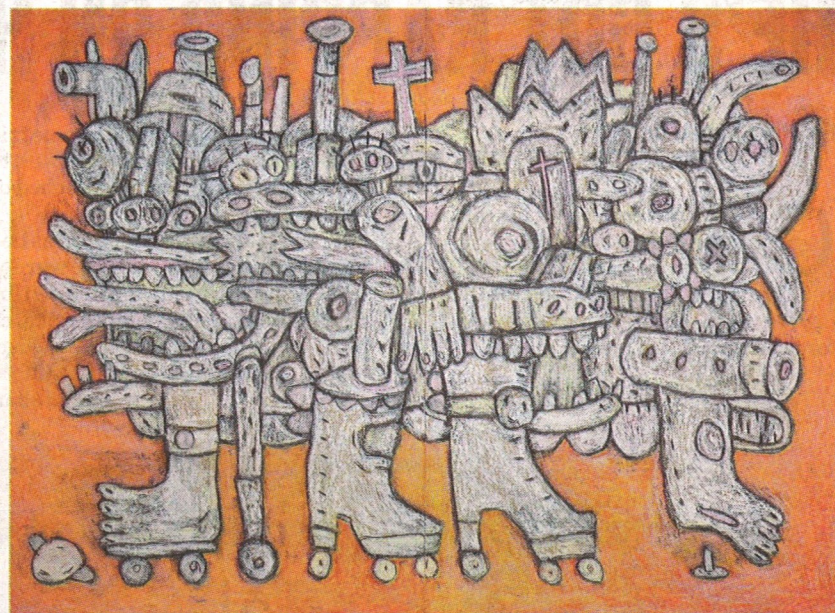


Photo by William Jaeger

At left, Fernando Orellana's "Our Indirect Channels" (2016-17, ink and pencil on paper).

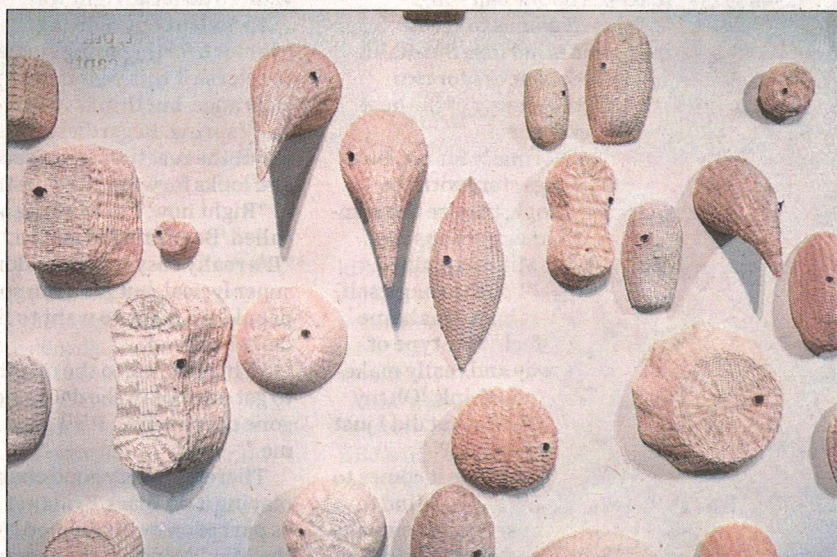


Photo by William Jaeger

Amy Podmore's "Untitled (audience)," 2016, plaster casts, mixed media, motors.

In fact, the wall of plaster casts of wicker baskets of all kinds is so quietly daring and different you might wonder why it's here. Each white object, hung on the wall like a ceremonial mask, has a glassy eye embedded in it. Watch for a while (and move a little, to trigger the motion sensor) and a few of them will blink. Freaky, surreal and stunning.

Podmore's two free-standing, nearly life-sized plaster sculptures are also

oddly searing and enchanting in their rough surfaces. In one we see a standing girl, feet together, posing in some kind of innocence (effected by Podmore's artful sensibility). In another disconcerting work, the partial form of a deer seems to be carrying the legs and feet (wearing real blue socks) of a child.

In both of these, we are taken into a fairy tale world of wonder and the suspension of disbelief. Imagining these works in another show, in the

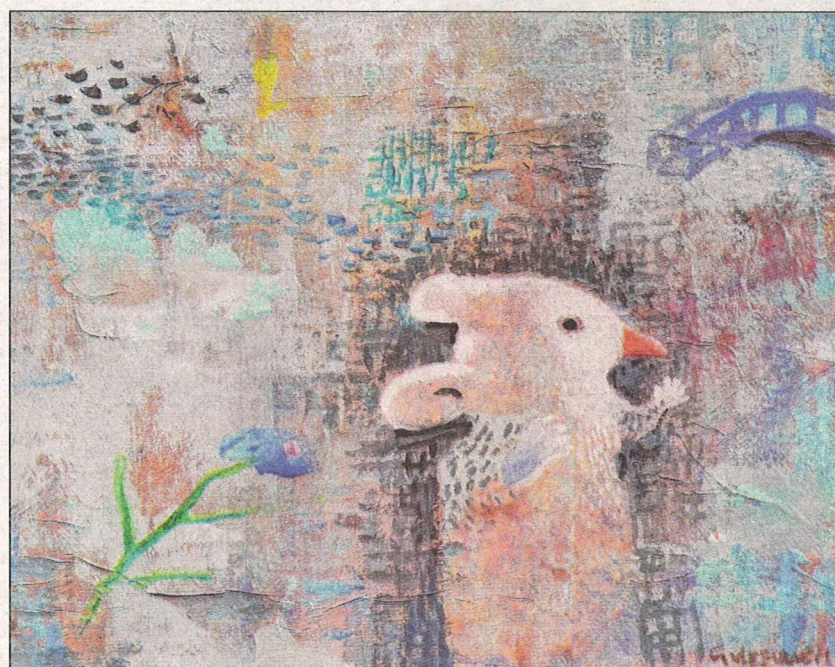


Photo by William Jaeger

Gerda van Leeuwen's "Spring II," coyote series (2014, monoprint and tempera on paper).

company of different kinds of work, I'm not sure they would appear so pure and non-threatening. But here they are, and the effect is complete as is. They even made me look twice at another series of small, blue paintings of rodents by van Leeuwen, where their

beautiful strangeness penetrated.

And so you can go fully around, techniques and ideas cross-fertilizing in this rich show.

► *William Jaeger is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.*