

Manzelli draws a floating pair of bikini underpants forgoing any contour of thighs or hips, implying human structure solely through the inclusion of an undergarment.

Often celebrated in terms of their psychological complexities, it is precisely their compounded idiosyncrasies that make Manzelli's characters trite and empty. They don facial expressions like hairstyles and fashionable clothing. We are as uninterested in them as they are in themselves. And that alone is intriguing. Unfortunately Manzelli tries to deflect the viewer from the abject emptiness of her drawings with goofy opening night performances and underwhelming art stunts like filtering her drawings through a single empty architectural landscape.

## DETROIT, MICHIGAN

By John Gayer

Nowadays, artists who ignore the multitude of materials and advanced technologies available to them are the exception rather than the rule. **MARY POTTS** (*Detroit Artists Market, February 20–April 11, 2004*) stands out from the crowd by expressing herself in charcoal, a humble and traditional medium. At first glance her drawings suggest a revival of nineteenth century investigations, a characteristic underscored by the exhibition's title: "Days of Sea and Sky." Pertinent references include Constable's cloud studies and seascapes and Monet's *Mer Agitée*. But closer scrutiny reveals that updating traditional practices forms only a part of her visual synthesis.

Potts works in various formats and on a large scale. Unlike the horizontal orientation of most of her pieces, the cloud studies *Sky Box I* and *Sky Box II* (both 2003) are square, and renderings of the same breaking wave have been repeated so often that they make up exactly half of the show. Works from the latter series also deviate from her primary medium. Some incorporate chalk pastel and one has been rubber-stamped. By using paper as long as 110 inches,

Potts gives herself ample room to smudge, rub or execute highly energetic strokes. Visually and technically, she deploys her media effectively.

From the center of the gallery the viewer easily can imagine being lost at sea. Blurry details in the distance, sunlight filtered through mist and the incessant choppiness of the sea are directly at hand. *Erased* (2004), for example, represents physical and mental fatigue experienced by one adrift. Lines made by Potts's eraser dart back and forth across medium gray tones, augmenting the languid haze and reinforcing the scene's oppressive character. This agitated linear network, revisited in *Tagged* (2004) and *Liberty Waits* (2004), also operates as a barrier between seer and seen. As such, it signifies the castaway's inner turmoil and sense of imprisonment.

On the longest wall in the gallery hang five of the six works based on the breaking wave theme. Black jagged lines, muted highlights or pastel grays alternately indicate turbulence, calmness or the diminished light of an overcast day. Sequenced according to their titles—*Day Eight* to *Day Twelve* (all 2004)—the works in this series mirror the repetition and variety that co-exist in everyday life. *Internet Ocean* (2004), the sixth version of this image, hangs on a separate wall. The rubber stamps used to fabricate this picture consist of HTML, the same code that generates a website of the image. Visually arresting in this rearranged state, interlayered lines of code resemble cross-hatching and confer a photographic crispness to the water's ripples when viewed from a distance. This manual rendering of digital elements comments on both the evolving character of images and the means of production.

In cross-sectioning Potts's materials, technique and chosen imagery, and the inferences made through the work, one observation surfaces: contrast links all levels. On the one hand, friable media depict water as liquid and vapor, and ink, a liquid medium, enables the re-manifestation of digital information through stamping, another centuries old technique.



Mary Potts, *Sky Box 1* (detail), 2003, charcoal and pastel on BFK Rieves Paper, 84 inches wide by 90 inches tall (courtesy Detroit Artists Market).

On the other, maritime imagery implying navigation, slow progress, the discovery of new horizons and the interweaving of constancy and change also refers to mental states, time, natural phenomena and virtual reality. While Potts's techniques superficially resemble the conventions of nineteenth century painters, empirical observation and its translation into visual terms do not guide her hands. Psychology and metaphor form Potts's focus, through which she delineates numerous associations regarding life's limits and possibilities.

## MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

By Michael Fallon

Three concurrent solo exhibitions at Franklin Art Works (*February 13–March 27, 2004*) examine, each in its own way, the intimacy of vision and how we often can see beyond surface appearances to detect deeper psychological meaning and insight. **Bruce Tapola's** "New Paintings" starts from the popular media and how the mind's eye perceives, registers, erases and manipulates this visual stimulus. **Clea Felien's** "Portraits," meanwhile, uses a novel technique to examine portrait subjects as both visual referent and psychological study and **Francis Gomila's** video projection *A Place Called Oxmoor* reveals the inner worlds of working class people in their homes in Huntingdon, England.

The simplest of these works, at least on the surface, is Gomila's video, a 30-minute single screen

projection over which plays a short, looped serenade for solo violin. On screen, the camera, which rests on a revolving turntable, scrolls through the living spaces of people at the Oxmoor estate—a working-class housing development outside of London. The resulting images flat-footedly display the possessions (or lack thereof, as the case may be) in the spaces. Occasionally, too, we see people inhabiting their homes while attempting self-consciously to avoid the camera's gaze. This simple technique comes across as a meditation on what outward appearances reveal of our inner lives. A voyeuristic fascination operates here, somewhat akin to the feeling we get watching reality TV. "Here is a guy whose place is rather a mess and cluttered with chintz," we think. "My life is not so bad." "Oh, that mangy dog is sitting on a rather ratty sofa," we observe, or, "she could really use some new wallpaper." Some of the spaces are particularly drab, while other spaces are painted over too cheerfully, colored with bright light in an effort to hide the truth behind the surface. The scenes say much about the human impulse to colorize, to disguise the self with stuff, to control the portrayal of the self. And therein lies this simple video's fascinating aspect: it allows us to speculate on the inner lives of the subjects using only the most superficial visual clues.

Gomila's video matches up well with the concerns addressed by Clea Felien's unusual but simple painting technique. Trained academically to paint in the classical manner of artists like Jacques-Louis David, Felien makes her untitled portraits using her untrained