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At Kemper at the Crossroads, there's no place like home

by [Liz Cook](#) | June 17, 2014



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***The Center Is
a Moving Target***

Through August 1 at Kemper at the Crossroads, 33 West 19th Street,
816-753-5784, kemperart.org

The title of Kemper at the Crossroads current exhibition is also its thesis. Curator Erin Dziedzic's *The Center Is a Moving Target* illustrates shifting definitions of regionalism — the notion nominally at the show's heart — with a collection of works that showcase the diverse practices of several local artists. "American Gothic" this isn't. The 12 artists on display here eschew representational art and reassuring rural scenery in favor of works that unsettle, reimagining the region in sometimes clashing mediums and in dazzling disarray.

Garry Noland's gold-dipped Styrofoam sculptures are among the first works to greet you as you enter the gallery. The artist's "Failed Monuments" showcase man-made materials in both warm and cool palettes, each piece weathered to a finish that suggests years of outdoor exposure and decay.

Illusions and visual deceptions seem at the heart of Noland's installation. His polystyrene obelisks sparkle like geodes underneath a layer of windswept grime, and pieces of rusty metal hardware poke from the base of a few pieces, suggesting a rebar frame. Only close inspection undermines the gravitas: Small gouges in their faces let the artificial blue and coral colors of the packing material peek through. But for all their manufactured wear, they still present gilded, glimmering faces to the world. Gold paint drips down their pointed tips, another illusory finish on a cheap, crumbling base.

Miki Baird's photographic collages are further monuments to the mundane. "Dirty Windows and Poems" assembles tiny prints of ordinary objects (pillows; red Solo cups; a single white, strappy shoe) into dizzying paper-craft sculptures. Running lines of repeated images, arrayed like fish scales, create furrows of color through the piece, and Baird varies the size of the patterned images to skew scale along with rhythm.

"Between Earth and Sky ... Altered Exit" evokes a texture more like armadillo plates, though its coiling green form seems more serpentine in composition. Paler coils amid the vivid colors suggest snake bellies turned to the sun.

Regionalism seems the most direct focus of Baird's "Street Threads 3," a collage assembled from photos taken on her daily commute. In refashioning and reiterating the commonplace, Baird creates a topographical map of a city all her own. Her prints streak across the sculpture like a computer-glitched image.

Many of the works on display challenge regionalist tropes from within, cloaking subversive work in traditional presentations. Diane Heise's art here is no exception. At the Kemper, a photograph and a video screen are hung side by side in the same thick white frames, a presentation that masks the electronic requirements of video and makes the screen seem, from afar, like just another still canvas. Her Fulbright-funded video installation, "Visions of Le Morne Inscribed," continues that deception; the 25-minute video's long, sustained shots of the landscape seem, at first glance, like photographs. Only when you get up close do you notice ripples skating across the water, trees bending in a gentle wind.

These long shots are punctuated with the occasional rapid-fire progression of still images as Heise tracks a path across the island, connecting shots as in a stop-motion feature. Plain black frames interrupt the flow at times, giving the video an eerie feeling of censure. The soundtrack adds to the effect, occasionally picking up voices, but more often just wind as it prickles the microphone and sends a chill through your body. Heise directs your exploration of the island in an immersive, sensory videoscape that calls atmospheric computer games to mind.

Three untitled oil paintings from Corey Antis hang nearby, offering more abstract insights into the region. The two most intriguing panels have a similar mottled, weathered look, pale colors feathering across the panels in dry brush strokes.

Cary Esser offers simple forms reimagined in earthenware sculptures of paper folios. She transfers the tropes of one medium to another, capturing in clay the toothy edge of thick paper or the gash of an envelope's mouth, all in an unadorned terra cotta shade.

Robert Josiah Bingaman's "Pool 1" has near-hypnotic power, a luminous contrast on canvas. A crisp aquamarine pool blinks from an abyssal black canvas that seems to absorb all other light. Bingaman expertly expresses the glow of diffuse underwater light transforming the pool to a pale, sickly green. Bingaman's oils are layered less thickly to create the pool, a near-matte finish that further contrasts with the shimmering black night surrounding it. Two other paintings from the artist, "Trinidad 1" and "Trinidad 2" feature similarly brilliant colors, but their composition is less arresting, the contrast less striking.

Across the gallery, Ricky Allman's enormous environments harmonize with Bingaman's more minimalist experiments, fusing a yawning metropolis with minute, biomic detail. "This Is a River," inspired by a creek in rural Kansas, suggests an industrial cityscape of unfinished beams and rafters, broken up with zones of light and smoke. Perspective and depth vary, and interior glimpses of "rooms" within the metallic beams provide a selective cross-section of the landscape.

Allman's work is an intricate mesh of structural impossibilities and shifting scales, stark black sunbursts and radiant colors. Light bursts from the lower quadrant of "This Is a River" like a fluorescent sunrise, cold gray and white light stretching up the painting. On the canvas' left and right extremes, textured globs of color intermingle like confetti, their loose forms inscribed with incredible detail. "River" is endlessly fascinating, an unsettling combination of conflicting visual themes that never seems off balance.

Allman's "All of Us Redux" is smaller in size but not in scope. "Redux" lets us peek into half-imagined structures (unfinished balconies, seemingly anchored to nothing; mountains condensed to the scale of furniture, visible as if through a storefront window). Allman's ability to synthesize complex patterns and stark, simple forms creates an experience for the viewer not unlike hearing an orchestra tune before the show. You note teasing snippets of music, maybe a few fully defined runs from the concerto to come — an effect pleasing in spite of, or because of, its dissonance.

At their best, these works at Kemper Crossroads make a similar unpredictable music. The artists here don't all subscribe to the same regionalist vision — some have rambled far from

wherever the center might be — and the disagreement informs the exhibition. If Dziedzic says contemporary art's center is a moving target, this show goes a way toward proving her point.



"All of Us Redux" by Allman



"Untitled" by Antis



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Another boring laundry list of descriptives masquerading as a review. It is toothless writing from someone with a deadeye and a critical faculty to match.

report

2 likes, 8 dislikes



like



dislike

Posted by **City Boy** on 06/19/2014 at 7:38 AM

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