

Review

**“Play”**

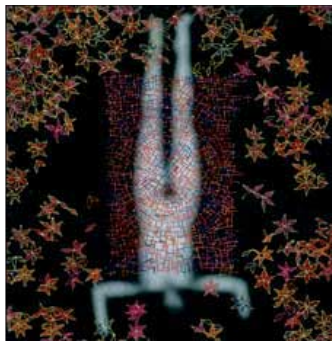
Lillstreet Gallery, Oct 2.

★★★★★

This exhibit is an apt swan song for its curator, Janeil Engelstad. The mission of the departing Lillstreet Art Center education director includes providing resources that help make art (and art education) more accessible. Engelstad invited four artists to submit work that addresses the intersection of play and art.

“Play” here lends itself to multiple interpretations: in work that depicts people at play; in the way artists play with different materials and their applications; and how they play games with their audiences with work that is quirky, ironic or amusing. Madeline De Joly applies paint and wax on photographs that juxtapose model trains with figures of Buddha and arhats (Buddhist enlightenment guides), creating beautiful images that are meant to suggest the merger of the material and the spiritual. Melissa Zexter’s embroidered photographs take the show’s theme most literally:

Her images—a girl running through a garden, a woman standing on her head—are embellished with intricate cross-stitching that provides a surprising dimension and texture to what is a relatively flat medium. Zoe Sheehan Saldaña offers two different takes on the theme. Like Zexter, she embroiders photographs; hers are digital images captured from the Internet, blending needlework, a centuries-old form of leisure, with surfing the Net (which couldn’t be more 21st century). With her works that she’s titled *Paper Bag Trade*, she meticulously reproduces standard printed shopping bags as if they were lovingly handcrafted objects, deliciously subverting our notions of what we consider “art.” “Play” offers some fine conceptualism; mostly, though, its overall impact is to suggest how much fun art can be. —Philip Berger



Melissa Zexter, *Floral Headstand*, 2006.