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It's like red but not quite: Pretty Portia Munson's *All Pink*.

Catskill's New Vision at BRIK Gallery

By Jeanette Fintz

No Place Like Home

As a visually oriented child, one of my most formative experiences was going to the movies to see *The Wizard of Oz*. The astonishing moment when Dorothy crosses the threshold separating a world of grays from one of eye-popping color is indelibly etched in my memory bank. The tantalizing sensation of somehow having entered a dazzling parallel universe was recently re-created for me at the opening of *No Place Like Home* at the shiny-new spacious BRIK Gallery in Catskill. My metaphor is sustained by the nature of the exhibition there, and is reinforced by the very presence of BRIK and its impact on Catskill's Main Street itself.

To start experiencing the exhibit, one enters the first of three rooms to the moonlit, beam-shifting photograms of Jared Handelsman, a mysterious gray nightworld of 42-by-56-inch silver-gelatin prints. These were done sans camera by exposing photosensitive paper to the passing phenomena of night lights on a country road. Painterly events documented without witness are precisely recorded with titles logging the date and time, gathering the data of night rather than wasting it while sleeping. Handelsman's light-triggered time-lapse prints are deceptively simple and mesmerizing.

Stepping through a narrow hallway, one is blasted by the full-throttle color environment created by Portia Munson, Handelsman's wife. Piles of green-on-green plastic detritus (gathered from a local Wal-Mart, perhaps?) are mounded up on the floor (the Emerald City?) and drop-dead-gorgeous 44-by-60 inch giclee prints of flower mandalas line the walls. The floor installation, *Green Piece*, is luridly beautiful in this hyperenvironment. Munson's installation celebrates how the human ability to perceive beauty transcends the most mundane facts, assisted in this case by color power.

Munson's oversized direct scans of lovely specimen flowers from her garden grip the moment of perfect beauty tightly, in contrast to her husband's laissez-faire process. Arranged in a concentric circular pattern, they create icons of

evanescence.

Her arrangements initially appear ecstatic—almost psychedelic—then take on a slightly morbid aspect of nature. The black grounds beneath the flowers (in actuality, above them), rather than flattening space, contain a hovering atmospheric of darkness, giving the feeling of a chamber. Munson began the flower mandalas after the death of her aunt.

The narrow corridor connecting these two rooms displays photographs by Sue Daley and Steve Gross (working collaboratively), Shelby Lee Adams, and Fawn Potash, which provide us with an unusual opportunity to get inside the life of Handelsman and Munson, a behind-the-scenes narration, if you will. The photos document the domestic and natural surroundings of the couple's two-child household in Round Top, N.Y. Adams' and Potash's landscapes of Kaaterskill Falls present an enchanted fairy-tale vision of the area; Daley and Gross' interiors have the theatricality and the color intensity to do justice to their subjects. The bright, zappy primary juxtapositions and eye-catching clutter recall photos of Frida Kahlo's Blue House. The photos by Gross and Daley, hung salon-style and displayed in unconventional and funky framing devices, depict a neoromantic lifestyle of city sophisticates in a rural setting, reminiscent of the Bloomsbury group's Vanessa Bell and her brood.....

While the art in this exhibition is world-class, ... The burgeoning of galleries and shops on Main Street Cayskill keep the erstwhile Greene County Council on the Arts company, such as M gallery and no-frills Wilder Gallery, point out that, to paraphrase Judy Garland, "we're not in Kansas anymore."

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