

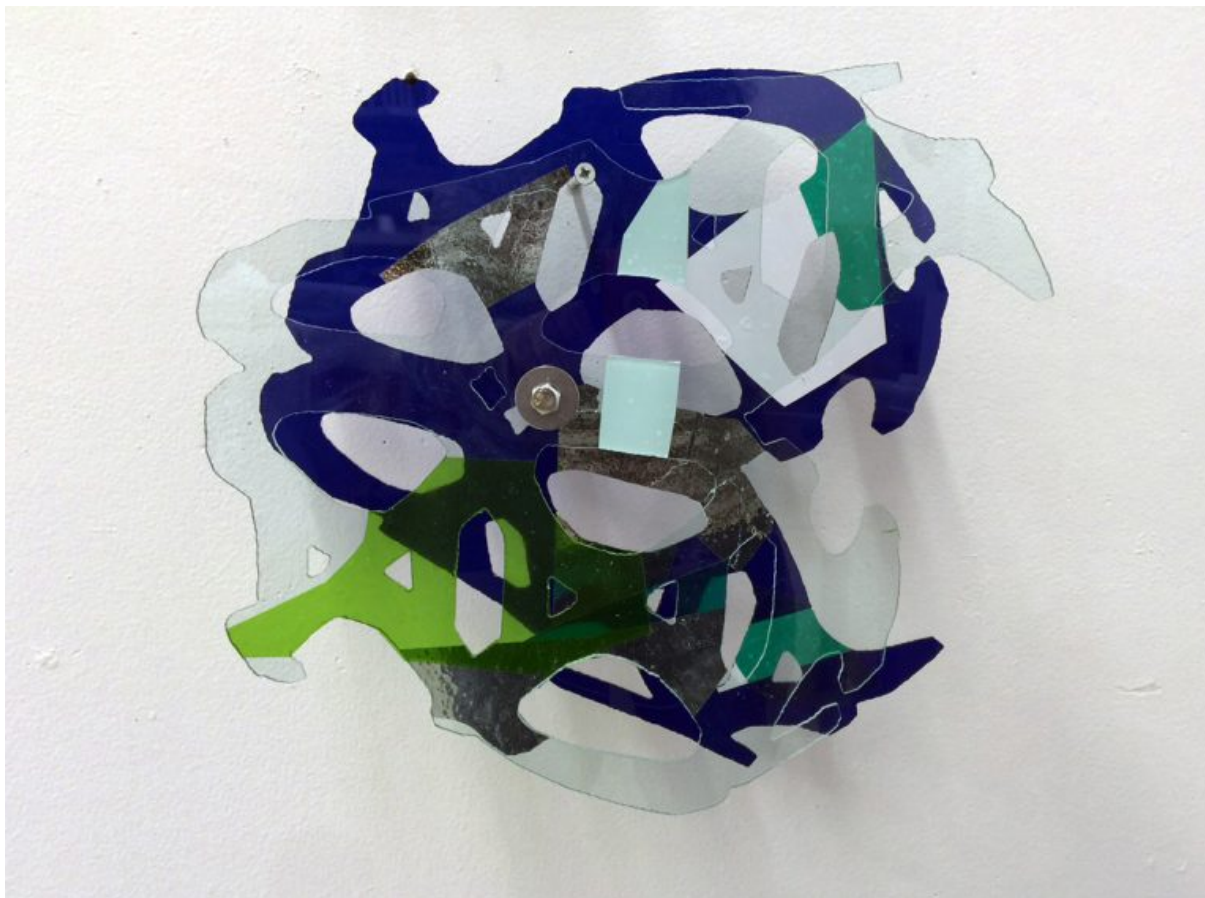


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Mighty Minis

By: Jacquelyn Gleisner



Mighty Minis is a big show of small works at Melanie Carr Gallery, a newcomer to the Essex community. Curated by the artist Suzan Shutan, the show features petite works from 30 artists. In the curator's statement, she explains that the decision to work small is practical and political "in the art world where bigness reigns." This is the second iteration—the first, at Souterrain Gallery—of Shutan's four-part series. (The following shows have not been scheduled.) Shutan's selection of miniatures display conventional and contemporary approaches to abstract painting.

On the more conventional end, Elizabeth Gourlay's square painting, *Eleven* (2017), combines horizontal swathes of muted grays, greens and salmon hues over exposed taupe linen. Gourlay's expert application of the Flashe paint is soft and the surface is matte. *Eleven* appears stately. Yet the success of Gourlay's sensitive color harmonies saves the work from the tedium of well-trodden tropes of abstract painting.

One of the smallest works in the show, Judith Farr's four-inch assemblage *Suspiciously Cheerful* (2017), provides a punchy counterweight to Gourlay's traditional painting. Farr's candy cane striped pipe cleaners, wool, and teal, sparkly paint are shaped into a goofy, flower form. As the title implies, *Suspiciously Cheerful* conveys a sense of playfulness. Many pieces in *Mighty Minis*—Debbie Hesse's *Six Pk #3* and Susan Knight's *Water Pods: Pod I*, among others—veer into sculpture.

Nancy Baker's *Tasting Dawn* (2017) strikes a balance between whimsy and sophistication. Her paper construction is made of complex facets of checkboards, marbling and a landscape vista peeking through the top left. The work's irregular boundary is pierced by interior shards of negative space. Baker's palette is saturated with crisp lime green and brilliant tangerine, but upon inspection, an even scrim of sprayed, dark paint over the surface of the work emerges. Rife with contradiction—abstraction and landscape, improvisation and calculation—Baker's interlocking forms sing at the small scale and hint at her ambitious large scale installations.

Miniature works demand attention, yet the works are not fussy. The strength of *Mighty Minis* is its reach. The works offer surprise and elegance, friskiness and craftsmanship, and all in small packages.

Image: Debbie Hesse, *Six Pk #3*, plexi, gels, hardware, 18 x 15". Courtesy of the artist.



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