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Artists on 'the Edge' at GSU

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So-called outsider art takes the stage as Georgia State's Welch School of Art presents "At the Edge," curated by Cathy Byrd. Organized in conjunction with a series of events addressing psychology and art, this show offers a multigenerational mix of artist participants who live in residential treatment facilities and thus work outside the mainstream.

In an exhibition that raises complex, varied and personal interpretations of the everyday as well as commentary on mental health care, Byrd puts together an aesthetically rich, finely tuned body of paintings, drawings and installation pieces. The adult contributions are on loan from the Living Museum in Queens, N.Y., a 40,000-square-foot art facility for residents of Creedmore Psychiatric Hospital.



(ENLARGE)

John Tursi's 'Pink Floyd Jacket' is covered with bright references to pop American culture of the tumultuous late 1960s and later, positing the straitjacket as multipurpose reference and object of ultimate confinement.

REVIEW

"At the Edge"

- Welch School of Art and Design Gallery. Through Nov. 8. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Mondays-Fridays; noon-4 p.m. Saturdays. Next "First Thursday," Oct. 4, 5-7 p.m. Georgia State University, 10 Peachtree Center Ave. 404-413-5230; www.gsu.edu/artgallery.

- Youth Art Connection Gallery. Through Oct. 19. Noon-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays. Next "First Thursday," Oct. 4, 5-7 p.m. 63 Auburn Ave. 404-614-6233, www.youthartconnection.org.

Bottom line: Diverse, textured, thought-provoking.

Among these many fine works are Frank Boccio's mixed-media canvases, subtly layered portraits that are simultaneously sophisticated and naïve, executed in lush color. Stephanie Dank's gleeful Rubenesque figures dance and ease across her surfaces, while Sabita Neron's large-scale charcoals and Vicki Kahn's delicate ink and watercolors each feature delightful, dramatically different casts of characters.

John Tursi's painted straitjacket commands immediate attention, patterned with a hodgepodge of oh-so-American imagery — Stars and Stripes, the Playboy bunny, fantasy figures, Pink Floyd's "The Wall." Suspended from the ceiling, it epitomizes the cultural contradictions that symbolize individual freedoms and, ultimately, their most extreme denial.

In 1988, the Living Museum's co-founder, Bolek Greczynski, and the "Battlefield Crew" created a wall of mixed-media television screens. Picture tubes have failed; the wall is dying. New York-based video artist Janet Biggs has preserved what remains in a mesmerizing video installation — yet another psychological echo of fading concepts and institutions.

Two small objects from Greczynski's large installation "The Garden of Lost Revolution" offer a coffee pot and worn book, both wrapped in bandages and covered in white plaster. Silenced and paralyzed, they form eloquent testimony to the historical landscape of mental health facilities.

On view in the Petit Salon are paper works from Atlanta's Skyland Trail, while the Youth Art Connection Gallery exhibits collections of drawings, photographs and mixed-media installations from The Bridge, Hillside, Devereaux Center and Laurel Heights Hospital. Guided by artist mentors, each of these projects provides poignant works that invite reflection.

In a striking photograph by Laurie, a 15-year-old Hillside resident, a young black woman bends forward against a wall, head bowed, fingers outstretched. This image is reused in a series of collaborative collages, each variation suggesting a subtle shift in perspective and possibilities. Looking at this imagery, we are reminded that artistic expression grants a measure of safe haven even for those still living at the edge.