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# Capsule Art Reviews: "Jerry Kearns: Between Heaven and Earth," "Little Known Facts," "Mary Heilmann: To Be Someone," "Ryan Geiger: Secret Garden"

Wednesday, Dec 26 2007

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**"Jerry Kearns: Between Heaven and Earth"** After the 2001 terrorist attacks, artist Jerry Kearns began a series of works inspired by the blue sky that was the backdrop of the twin towers collapsing. "Between Heaven and Earth" captures the confusion and conflict of that day, as well as the absurdities and paradoxes it has spawned. Kearns creates digital collages made up of Islamic mosque architecture and images from weightlifting magazines, pornography and anatomy books, and he superimposes them onto canvas. He then fills the negative space with acrylic blue. The results are dynamic, funny and troubling images with recurring motifs of violence, sex and infant-operated weaponry. A subtitle for the entire series could be "The Sky Is Falling." Also included are religious-themed works like *Ripped*, an image of a bodybuilder with the head of Jesus (complete with crown of thorns and halo) flexing his muscles and glancing heavenward to a bit of text that reads "YOU WANT THE TRUTH...WHY?" And then there are utterly ridiculous pieces like *Burger King*, a rendering of someone who looks like *Johnny Knoxville* surrounded by floating cheeseburgers (obviously *Wendy's*, though). Through January 5, 2008. *Deborah Colton Gallery*, 2500 Summer, 713-864-2364. — **TS**

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**"Little Known Facts"** For "Little Known Facts" at Lawndale Art Center, curator Michael Guidry convinced artists to let him borrow and exhibit their prized collections of stuff. The participating artists did that and more — they also threw in some of their actual artwork. The results are pretty interesting. *David Aylsworth*, he of the bold abstract brush-stroke paintings, has a really funny collection of old homoerotic literature — there are muscle mags from the '50s and dime novels from the '60s with cheesy beefcake covers. (This kinda puts a new spin on Aylsworth's recent show at Inman Gallery, "A Mixture of Catholicism, Pasta, and Pornography," as well as his pairing with Tom of Finland.) *Andrew Groocock* has a phenomenal collection of 300, count 'em, 300 toy robots that are reminiscent of his angular and segmented sculptures. Meanwhile, *Gabriela Trzebinski's* work, along with her collection of clippings, presents a fascinating and poignant insider's take on her hometown of *Nairobi, Kenya*, and her experience as a white African in America. Through January 5, 2008. 4912 Main, 713-528-5858. — **KK**

**"Mary Heilmann: To Be Someone"** The main show at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston is an engaging and, at times, exasperating retrospective of Mary Heilmann's work since the late '60s. Heilmann, born in 1940 in San Francisco, went through a "beatnik-surfer-hippie-chick" phase in the late '60s, then moved to New York and began painting in the style of her heroes, minimalists like *Donald Judd* and *Agnes Martin*. Her early work bears that cool-school influence; during this time, Heilmann honed her original touches, such as the juxtapositions of geometry and fields of primary color seen in the diptych *L.A. Pair* (1976) and *French Screen* (1978), two works that alternate pairings of red, yellow and blue. Heilmann's work was influenced by music. Her '80s paintings reflect the brightly colored, checkerboard-emblazoned fashions of the decade. Sentimentality persisted through the '90s, and Heilmann's once-hard edges softened. Much has been made about her story — she even penned a memoir in 1999. This aspect can get a little frustrating, probably because there's so damn much of it, and because Heilmann's bio shouldn't be necessary to analyze this retrospective. But it's made clear to viewers that works have specific connections to the artist's personal experiences. When the backstory feels as important as the painting itself, we're left shuffling to decide from which perspective to look. Also, it seems as if the CAMH threw the show up in a day, covering as much of the walls as possible. Paintings hang in very close proximity with no rhyme or reason as to placement, and they're confusingly labeled. Through January 6, 2008. 5216 Montrose, 713-284-8250. — **TS**

**"Ryan Geiger: Secret Garden"** The otherworldly aviary of Ryan Geiger's imagination is rendered in "Secret Garden," an impressive exhibit currently on view at Rudolph Projects/ArtScan Gallery. These surreal paintings find Geiger working in a brilliantly efficient mode and honing his considerable skill. Recurring motifs (birds and trees excluded) include five-pointed stars, clouds and floating, conical rock formations. The environments evoke the background landscapes in Warner Bros. cartoons — zany and exaggerated. Text sometimes augments the imagery as a self-referential comment on a theme. *Memory Is Long* employs curved lines and an arrow to mark the flight paths of birds exiting an ordinary birdhouse hanging from a tree branch. In a Magritte-inspired touch, the tree trunk's bark has been exposed to reveal a red-brick core. Empty speech balloons sometimes appear next to birds, as in *Oracle*, a painting influenced by Greek myth. Of course, bird speech is unprintable, but Geiger solves that issue by manipulating the balloon somehow, painting it as if it were dripping or imbued with a foul substance, communicating an emotional state. And don't miss Geiger's foray into sculpture, a huge cardinal named *Earnest*, with whom you may have your photo taken in various scenes of Hitchcock-inspired mayhem. Through December 29. 1836 Richmond, 713-807-1836. — **TS**

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