

GET VISUAL

THINGS SEEN AND HEARD ON THE CAPITAL REGION ART SCENE AND BEYOND

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2014

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith at Mandeville Gallery

A fine, small show of paintings and prints by the Native American artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith fills [Union College's Mandeville Gallery](#), situated in the extraordinary Nott Memorial in the center of the college's campus green. Smith is internationally known for the skillful way she combines primitive, symbolic imagery with modern painterly style, and as an articulate voice for women and Native Americans.



This contemporary take on the Sisyphus myth, titled *Sissy and the Plutocrats* is, at six by eight feet, the largest painting in the Jaune Quick-to-See Smith show at Union College. All the paintings reproduced here are oil and acrylic on canvas.

I'll admit I was not familiar with this artist before hearing about this show, but it lived up to expectations in a number of ways. First, Smith is a mature artist who knows her way around a canvas, and who maintains a sense of humor while addressing socially- and politically-charged issues. Second, the selection presented here is limited in scope while still being broad enough to satisfy a first-time viewer. So it clearly communicates her vision and messages without being overwhelming.



Shock and Awe

The space is circular, which suits this presentation particularly well, as Smith establishes and returns to certain themes repeatedly. One can comfortably walk around and around, taking in the imagery and relating it from one piece to the next without concerns for order or hierarchy.

There are nine paintings and six prints in this selection, and it is immediately clear that, for Smith, printmaking is a serious pursuit, not a cheaper substitute for painting. One of my favorite pieces in the show is a lithographic riff on a war shirt that evokes Jim Dine's *Bathrobe* series as well as other modern or Pop art styles, but remains clearly a Smith invention. (seen here at right).

Other work brings the wunderkind Haitian-American painter Jean-Michel Basquiat to mind, not a bad thing at all, because Smith infuses his neo-primitive, graffiti-inspired style with her own distinctive and powerful set of cultural symbols. One of those symbols, seen in the top, left area of the painting reproduced at the beginning of this review, is the rabbit, which seems to exist as a stand-in for Smith herself, or for her people in general. At times rendered into a flat cartoon, at others more expressively drawn, this character seems to know who it is and where it stands in the context of the picture, not to mention in the world beyond the picture.

In this way, Smith exudes her own confidence and convinces us that the things she cares about are worthy of our attention. The show ends on Nov. 30, and the gallery is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day. See it if you can.

- David Brickman



Imperialism