

JCCC AND EPSTEN | 'Homecoming'

## LOCAL ARTISTS GO MAKE GOOD

Galleries display works by renowned artists who made their start in the KC area.

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The Kansas City Star

A new exhibit offers the opportunity to see the work of 10 Kansas City-connected artists who are achieving broad art world success. Their work is jointly on view at the Johnson County Community College Gallery of Art and the Epsten Gallery at Village Shalom in Overland Park.

It's a homecoming of sorts for Brian Fahlstrom, who grew up in Parkville and trained at the Kansas City Art Institute. Fahlstrom's work is now featured in the world-renowned Saatchi Collection in London, assembled by British supercollector Charles Saatchi. Rashawn Griffin was a "revelation" to Gallery of Art director Bruce Hartman, who co-curated "Homecoming" with Village Shalom's Kent Smith. The African-American artist grew up in Olathe and went to Yale. He was a 2005-2006 artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem and currently is in a show at the prestigious Mary Boone Gallery in New York. "We've spent the past 15 years building an infrastructure of support and nurturing for artists in the community," Hartman said. "Now it seems like a great moment to say, 'Perhaps we're at that place, and here are artists from our region and they've achieved real success.'" Fahlstrom's abstracted landscapes, with their flamelike shapes and sense of uncontrollable energy, emanate a biblical sense of foreboding. Griffin's freestanding panels stretched with denim, flannel and corduroy take their sparse compositions from minimalism but inject a human presence into its austere industrial vocabulary. These fabrics touch the body in work clothes and sheets. Andrzej Zielinski's luscious paintings of laptops and automated teller machines are reason enough to visit "Homecoming." In Zielinski's hands, these ubiquitous devices take on the allure of children's toys, with fresh candy colors and exaggerated shapes. His "Green ATM" looks like it was once melted and pulled like dough. Zielinski's career trajectory is revealing. The 30-year-old artist was born in Parkville and began his art training at Johnson County Community College before earning a bachelor's in fine arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a master's in fine arts from Yale University. He now lives in Rome, and his work is in high demand. Hartman, who also is the director of the college's Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art (scheduled to open in June 2007), was one of Zielinski's first patrons. "I bought a laptop painting for the college two years ago for \$600 when he graduated from Yale," Hartman said. A year later, when the laptop paintings appeared in the high-profile emerging talent roundup, "Greater New York" at PS1 MoMA in New York, they sold out at \$4,500 apiece. And collectors take note: Amy Myers, a 1995 alum of the Kansas City Art Institute, sold a drawing to the college for \$300 in 1996. Today, her large works on paper go for \$25,000. There are three of them in "Homecoming."

During artists' remarks at the opening reception, Myers credited Warren Rosser, chair of KCAI's painting department, as a key influence on her work. But her earliest inspiration came from her physicist father, who introduced her to "the mysteries of the universe." The imagery of her large drawings combines the precision of scientific illustration with an irrepressible sense of whimsy, as if a gaggle of girly little fairies broke into a genetics lab and tied rainbow-colored bows and ribbons onto strands of DNA. But the drawings also are sensual and sexual, ultimately evoking those mysteries of the universe Myers pondered early on. Hartman bought Myers' "Chroma Zoma Bubble Chamber" for the Nerman Museum, a purchase made with acquisitions funds from Tony and Marti Oppenheimer. In the last two years he has added new works by six of "Homecoming's" 10 artists to the Nerman's collection, including Zielinski's "Green ATM" and a painting by Eric Sall.

Sall is a 1999 KCAI alum who made local headlines by winning a \$20,000 Joan Mitchell Foundation grant while still in grad school at Virginia Commonwealth University. He has three large paintings in "Homecoming." Skateboard culture is a primary inspiration for these works, with their precarious sense of balance, kinetic swoops of the brush and clustered daubs of paint that imitate the bright stickers owners use to personalize their skateboards.

British-born Carl Fudge, who spent a year at the Kansas City Art Institute in 1987, rounds out the JCCC part of "Homecoming" with a group of ornamental abstractions created by manipulating found images on the computer. In the paintings and prints here he manipulates Andy Warhol's camouflage paintings and erotic Japanese prints from the Edo period. The ghosts of some of modernism's giants hover about the Village Shalom half of the show. The jazzy gridded background and leafless trees of Wamego, Kan., native Benjamin Butler's 6-by-10-foot oil, "Fifty five Trees at Sunset," is like a fusion of the pre-abstractation Mondrian with the Mondrian who painted "Broadway Boogie Woogie." A similar *déjà vu* emanates from KU alum Christopher Lucas' druggy female portraits, which recall proto-Cubist works by Marcel Duchamp. Reincarnation is the theme of these paintings, conveyed through fractured and diaphanous shapes alluringly executed in epoxy-dispersed dye on canvas. The surrealist Yves Tanguy earned a place in art history for his otherworldly scapes populated with strange little biomorphic forms. Sandy Winters, a one-time student at KU, gives the genre a contemporary, age-of-the-grotesque update with her new paintings of primitive/biomechanical life forms existing in globelike terrariums set in nature.

**Village Shalom's most intriguing offering is a painting by Scott Anderson, who grew up in Olathe and earned his bachelor's in fine arts from Kansas State. Anderson, who lives in Chicago, is gaining a considerable reputation for his enigmatic sci-fi scenarios. The work in the show depicts a kind of subterranean laboratory/game room equipped with control boards and glowing monitors with the attendant wires and cords. The overall sense is rather sinister, but it's countered by vignettes such as a grouping of chairs around a cooler of Champagne.**

In addition to engaging work, "Homecoming" is about inspiring confidence and building relationships. "It certainly raises the profile with dealers when it comes to looking at Kansas City as a place that produces topnotch artists," Hartman said. "And it's absolutely part of the project of self-esteem building." Of course the rub here is that all of these artists had to leave Kansas City to gain national success.

The next trick is to find a way for KC art to be exported without having to export the artists, too.