

REVIEW

Playing matchmaker with these six 'couples'

COUPLES. Through June 2 at the Islip Art Museum, 50 Irish Lane, East Islip. For exhibition hours and admission prices, call 631-224-5402 or visit islipartmuseum.org.

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Marriage is often described as "work" — a project of compromise and compassion. So how do two artists, those avatars of individualism, function as members of a couple? Does each entertain envy for the other's success? Do they influence each other's styles, or get on each other's nerves? Does a husband seek inspiration from a wife or does he deliberately turn away, afraid of her influence?

The Islip Art Museum's "Couples," curated by Karen Shaw, deftly addresses these questions by assembling the work of six couples and inviting viewers to deduce which artist is paired with which. It's like a detective game with art as evidence.

One pair that obviously shares the same sensibility is Leslie Wayne and Don Porcaro. They operate in different media — he's a sculptor, she's a painter — but both luxuriate in color and indulge in subtle humor. Porcaro's whimsical zoomorphs evoke insects but look more like intergalactic aliens with machine-like heads and manifold limbs. Colorful and curious, they meld a wealth of influences, from children's toys to Japanese anime to Bosch's mythic monsters decked out in rainbow hues.

Wayne uses an almost identical palette in paintings that seem to be ripping themselves apart before our eyes. Radiant pigment erupts from the flat, neutral surface like ribbons of flayed skin, exposing inwards that are bright and intoxicating in their baroque splendor. Like Porcaro's wacky beast-like figures, Wayne's paintings tap into an organic metaphor: He

builds bodies and she takes them apart, spectacularly.

Virginia Maksymowicz and Blaise Tobia at first seem diametrically opposed in their approach, but it's possible to discern common threads. Tobia is a photographer whose pictures appeal to the head more than the heart. He exposes hidden cultural narratives. One group of pictures deals with nature tamed, groomed and circumscribed: the base of a tree boxed in with bright orange mesh to ward off uncurbed dogs; a row of motorcycles facing a mountainous panorama that is really only a mural painted onto the concrete walls of an underground garage. Another series juxtaposes traffic signs

and sexually explicit advertisements, suggesting that curves in a road or in a body constitute both excitement and threat.

Maksymowicz is also interested in the way a woman's anatomy, however matter-of-factly presented, can generate unease. Her "couple," life-size casts of the lower halves of two women's naked bodies, come accompanied by warnings of "adult material." In her more direct style, Maksymowicz raises the same issues her husband does with regard to the female form: Why should caution be needed? Why is this territory still hostile?

Maksymowicz and Tobia are the only ones to have smuggled sexual content into an otherwise prim exhibit that is ostensibly about love. Perhaps it's the delicacy of the museum's sensibility that prevented it from including any homosexual relationships and seeing what dynamic that produced. It's a small show, of course, with built-in limitations — six pairs of artists in traditional marriages cannot stand in for all creative couples. But it might have been interesting to include some variety in lifestyle as well as in artistic style.

"A Hefty Hunk of Burnin' Funk," by Leslie Wayne; below, "Nomad 20," by Don Porcaro, both part of the "Couples" show at the Islip Art Museum.

