Exhibition Guide
Metaphorical

The word “metaphorical” refers to something that is used to imply something else. The creative act often suggests the use of metaphor, as artists frequently make use of symbols to create meaning and impart ideas. In contemporary art, many artists are interested in conveying ideas beyond the actual representation of what they see; instead, they address themes that move well beyond the mere visual replication of their subjects. The artists who are exhibiting here use metaphor in their works to convey emotions, meaning and idea. While their subject matter is recognizable in terms of representing something “realistic,” these artists move beyond the obvious into the realm of the symbolic.

Painter Renee McGinnis uses the metaphor of the stricken luxury liner to represent fragility. These beautiful vessels, painted with a lushness and tenderness, are the result of man’s technological advances, and yet have been overcome by nature. As McGinnis suggests, “through this intelligent juxtaposition of the liners’ youthful debuts and their eroded demises, McGinnis presents a striking ambiguity. She vividly asserts that the balance between the nautical image and its natural border is as fragile as that between man and his environment: doomed, yet unimaginably beautiful.” As viewers admire the wonder and detail of McGinnis’ painting technique, they are ultimately haunted by the floundering ships’ symbolic death.

Dr. Robert Magrisso addresses death and vulnerability in his sculptures metaphorically by using overt and hidden symbols. After going through a “near death” experience from a heart attack in which he was brought back to life by his own medical colleagues, Dr. Magrisso turned to the powerful capacity of the imagination to investigate his own spirituality. His work includes figures from stories and myth, archetypal symbols (such as the ladder and moon), and sources of spiritual and physical healing. The works promote thought, as the viewer is asked to connect the various symbols to personal experiences, allowing various interpretations of the works. Magrisso’s works suggest layers of meaning from the direct enjoyment of the narrative, to a suggestion of dreams, to finally a journey into the deeper human spirituality seeking enlightenment.
Sophia Nahli Allison considers herself a visual journalist, which is reflected in her more public work that addresses various social themes. But in her very personal photographic journey, her work metaphorically reflects her journalistic interest in gender, race, sexuality and spirituality. She uses the human figure (often herself) blended with a symbolic surface of mud, or other coverings, to lead us to an emerging vision of self, as she represents her own “coming out”. Cultural symbols, too, remind us of her search for identity as a woman of color. Nahli Allison uses text, as well, to ask us as viewers to reflect on the meanings of her images. Her works ask questions rather than present solutions, so that we as viewers can relate our own searching for meanings in our lives to that of the artist.

Artist Joanna Pinsky uses architectural forms to create her shaped paintings. Her works employ site specific installation and positioning to create meaning. It is the combination of and relationship between images that blend metaphorically to create a narrative content to her work. Her frequent travels to Cuba are reflected in the architectural styles and hot colors. Her use of warped and twisted perspective make these works much more than directly observed architecture and instead give the viewer a sense of apprehension of space. The dizzying viewpoints and angled forms give a symbolic perception of a cultural experience that might include sound, scent and taste, as we are sent on a symbolic journey through space and time.

Each of the exhibited artists uses symbolism and metaphor to convey idea, concerns or his or her search for meaning. There is a variety here of metaphor used, reflecting individual journeys in the creative process. We are asked to reflect and spend time with these images, to interpret and wonder at their meanings. These works ask us to be active participants as viewers, and our experiences are made richer by our involvement and interpretation.

--Beth Shadur
Curator