

Mix It Up
Through August 29
The Selden Gallery
208 E. Main St., Norfolk
664-6880, www.theselden.com

MIX IT UP IS A REFERENCE TO the mixing of media and found objects in the assemblages of New York's Ellen Alt, Chicago's John Rozelle and the Seven Cities' Elizabeth Warson.

Alt describes her collages as "conversations" between diverse aspects of life. And they do indeed seem like a collection of polite, even interesting, dinner conversations, perhaps at a banquet. But there is no keynote address. Nothing makes you put down your fork and take note.

Alt is a competent formalist and careful craftsman, creating pleasing and faintly curious compositions of wire, pills, mesh, rusted metal, circuits, photos, photograms, twigs, fabric and more. She knows how to establish a focal point, how to lead the eye, how to create unity, variety, balance and all the rest of it. She has even permeated these layered compositions with content so that they function as little microcosms, just not terribly compelling ones.

There is little to passionately embrace or to vehemently decry. The work leaves one nod-

dling in pleasant agreement, but not exchanging loaded looks across the table nor kicking someone under it.

John E. Rozelle is a more sophisticated formalist. His work—with its aged, nostalgic look—is elegant, restrained and cohesive. The artist has clear roots in the "altered art" movement which is an imprecise umbrella for collage, found art, book-making, 2- and 3-D assemblage and the like. In fact, many of his pieces appear like a page torn from a scrapbook, albeit a highly refined one.

Within the parameters Rozelle has established for himself, the work is inventive and evocative, even politely provocative. Take *N-Rose* and *HM Wall*, in which the meaning sneaks up on you. His overall content deals largely and poetically with the African-American experience, especially the African Dias-

pora. According to the artist, even his process of construction is a metaphor for diverse elements within African-American traditions.

Given that context, both works become loaded with meaning. In the former highly symmetrical composition, torn translucent and opaque paper in rectangles of cream, splattered sepia and orange are collaged over a musical score. At the top is a large broken letter N while below is the word "rase," presumably a homophone for "race." In the latter, a sepia-toned portrait photograph of a well-dressed African-American man is overlaid on a musical score and both are overlaid on an indeterminate brown and stained background. Printed on top of the man's face are the words "Wall Hanging." Make

of those what you will, for Rozelle is not didactic—but his meaning seems pretty apparent without being too forced or too clever.

Elsewhere in the artist's complex work, unfolded envelopes become house forms with all that that implies, and old ledger pages a symbol for the economic backdrop of the African-American experience. But that is just the beginning. Mining Rozelle's work is like pouring over books and sifting through boxes in some unknown ancestor's attic, looking for clues and piecing together meaning.

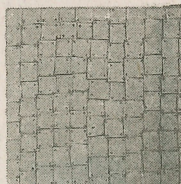
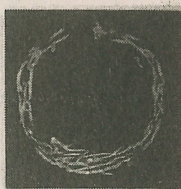
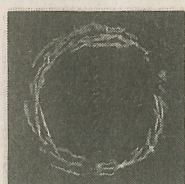
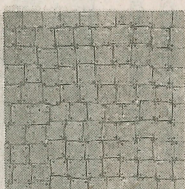
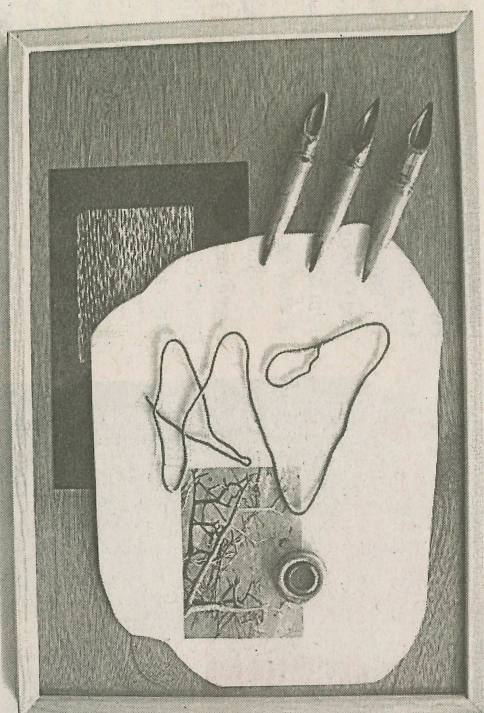
Elizabeth Warson's work is bigger, bolder, more soulful and, in some ways, more formally

IN THE MIX: (Clockwise from top) *HG-Meeting* by John Rozelle; *Cyclical Directions*, *Felt Series* by Elizabeth Warson; *Cyclical Directions #14*; *Bamboo Static* by Ellen Alt

simple than the other artists'. This art therapy professor's black, white, gold and red compositions seem to pulse with energy and life. They are especially effective when she treats the entire surface rather than attaching panels to wooden supports.

Warson's tactile geometric gridded compositions are made of felt, wax, nails, plastic and pigment with highly complex surface designs, as revealed on close inspection. Based largely on the simple shape of an equilateral cross, they have a decorative appeal, yet they are not merely decorative. Rather, each one is informed by the artist's experiences with Native American cultures, a fact that can be perceived and felt in her explorations of patterns, relationships and structures, as well as in her application of weaving and stitching techniques. ●

For more on Alt and Rozelle's work visit www.ellenalt.com and www.sanadproductions.com.





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