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GALLERIES

By Cate McQuaid | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT | JANUARY 14, 2014

Paint, plaster, and craft

Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz has made several series of paintings about the aftermath of war, combining sharp pictorial narrative with a cracking, crumbling surface. In recent years, she has left the picture behind to more deeply explore the painterly potential of rubble. Violence is implied rather than spelled out. The power in her show at Miller Yezerksi Gallery is twofold: Loss and degradation are undeniable, but so is this artist's ability to push painting's limits.

The works, made with plasticized Hydrocal (a kind of plaster) and paint, teeter between representation and abstraction. It's easy to see them as broken ground, littered with rocks. But look again, and they're roughed-up surface and canny facture. Shadows, crimps, and seams read as painterly gestures. The rocks aren't rocks; the dirt is not dirt. It's just paint, plaster, and craft.

In "The Ground Never Speaks (3) (with grass and twig)," Spatz-Rabinowitz lightens her pigment in an upper corner, suggesting a shaft of light. The ground beneath it buckles. Look from the side and you'll see she got behind her Hydrocal plate and poked it forward - the painting pushed toward sculpture. A reddish twig meanders in from the left. Grass, a sprig of hope, sprouts from the bottom.



Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz's "Arctic Dream (sketch)"

In "Arctic Dream (sketch)," rust makes straight cuts into the bluish surface, which we can read as ice or snow. Again, there's a story here - human detritus mars a ground many tend to think of as pristine. Then there's the rugged abstraction: slashes of rusty brown, crumbling blue gray, a faint woven texture below. The works here succeed because they're not one or the other, but both.

More information:

Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz: Locations Unknown

At: Miller Yezerksi Gallery, 460 Harrison Ave., through Feb. 4. 617-262-0550, www.milleryezerskigallery.com