

The Temple News

Arts & Entertainment

Exhibit showcases nature, technology and beyond

At the Gross McCleaf Gallery in Center City, new exhibit “As Far As The Eye Can See” explores artistic perspectives of landscape through a range of mediums.

by [Angela Gervasi](#) 27 July 2015

Like many young artists, Matthew Colaizzo sometimes drew in his notebook instead of paying attention in class. In kindergarten, he doodled cars, but by high school, the South Philadelphia native was secretly sketching enormous trees onto whimsical landscapes.

Years later, when the Tyler alum, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts graduate and Penn State Abington professor moved for a year to Throop, Pa., his interest in sketching, painting and etching scenery expanded.

“I guess because I lived in the city,” Colaizzo said, “I was always fascinated with what was the surrounding areas and other small town life and such.”

Throop, a small borough outside of Scranton with a population of about 4,000, contained many massive and abandoned coal mines that inspired Colaizzo’s work.

“Do you like, drive on the highway and you see a bunch of big piles of dirt, and they’re kind of beautiful; they look like mountains?” Colaizzo said. “It’s kind of like zoning out and pretending you’re somewhere else, escaping the world for a second.”

Colaizzo’s aquatint etchings, or etched copper plates meant to resemble watercolors, are currently on display at the Gross McCleaf Gallery on 16th and Samson streets in the exhibit “As Far As the Eye Can See.” The show explores 18 different artistic perspectives of landscape, ranging from tranquil oil paintings of the Schuylkill River to snowy encaustic portrayals of a winter cityscape.

While Colaizzo often works with copper and wood, featured artist Alison Berry uses cartography to explore culture.

Berry became interested in what she refers to as “conceptual geography” from an early age. The painter, who came to live in the U.S. as a young child, grew up surrounded by American culture and a British family. Her parents, both scientists, represented another cultural clash: her father, an atheist, and her mother, a devout Episcopalian, shared different beliefs.

After graduating from Yale with a bachelor’s in art and receiving her MFA from Brooklyn College, Berry strove to find a way to portray cultural relationships and patterns: she discovered the magic of maps.

“You might think about a road map that could tell you how to get from New York to Philadelphia,” Berry said, “but there are all kinds of other maps that might tell you, say, concentrations of populations: how many people living in a certain area have dogs. How many people living in a certain area drive Fords.”

Berry’s piece in the show, “Crossroads,” abstractly documents her perception of the relationship between nature and technology. When explaining her creation of the piece, Berry cited the positives and negatives of technology’s growing presence, touching upon the advancement of healthcare and the thinning of the ozone layer. In other words, an intensive research process often fuels Berry’s work. To prepare for works like “Crossroads,” she has compiled stylistically or conceptually relevant images.

“And the [images] that are left over from that painting go into the next painting,” Berry said.

“As Far As the Eye Can See” will run until July 31. While mostly paintings, the assortment of artwork ranges from the abstract oil paintings of Alexis Serio, whose artwork can be found on the walls of Temple’s Alter Hall, to the realistic aerial views of lakes and forests by Alexandra Tyng. The exhibition’s diversity in style, medium and subject matter truly shows how versatile and experimental the concept of “landscape” can be. And as Colaizzo often tells his students at Penn State Abington, continuous exploration is a key part to achieving true artistry.

“Not knowing what you’re doing as an artist is really good,” Colaizzo said. “Because it means you’re still trying to figure it out. It keeps you asking questions.”