

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

by ROBIN TRAFTON

She makes art like a girl. It is pretty, youthful, decorative, delicate, and lighthearted – and it welcomed, like a breath of fresh air. At Byron Cohen Gallery of Contemporary Art, Brooklyn based artist, Allie Rex, shows a meandering rainbow wall installation of painted mylar and vinyl that reads like Matisse cut-outs for the today's younger generation.

Allie Rex, who earned an MFA in painting at Cranbrook in 2004, joins forces with other female abstractionists creating girl-powered poetic formalism, such as Polly Apfelbaum, Beatriz Milhazes, Jessica Stockholder, and Rachel Hayes. Shared is an interest in bold, crisp color, industrious installation, and resilient optimism.

Rex draws and paints with acrylic on thin sheets mylar and vinyl, then cuts out loops, wavy lines, heart shapes and abstract patterns before attaching them to the gallery wall with tiny stick pins. Sometimes she layers them together in dense, impulsive pop-up book constructions. Other times individual heart shapes, directional arrows, or circles the size of a peas cluster together in a color cloud.

Much of the installation was appropriated from an earlier gallery show in Boston in 2006, viewable on her website. Now dissected and displayed in bite-size clusters, the installation appears less dramatic than its powerful, large-scaled predecessor. But it is this new approach of recycling past work in order to create something new, that inspired the show's title, "Where Does it Come From, Where Does it Go?"

In an interview with the artist, Rex stated, "I think this question can apply to the physical parts of the installation. Where are they going next, and what is their history? But I am also interested in applying this question to other ideas that inform my work; recombining "patterns" that build upon themselves to create something new or to destroy something, such as energy, molecules, cells, infections, animals, people, labor, behavior, weather, stars."

Rex's nimble use of form moves paint in new ways. Bending, weaving, curling and exploding with bursts of color, her work turns on a spout of associations, from over-the-top valentine cards, to nostalgic 1980's rainbow-themed school folders, to New Years confetti -- keeping the viewer looking and thinking.

The cheerful reverberations of Rex's installation abruptly ends with the sharp contrast of Lawrence Gipe's solemn painting series in Byron Cohen's upper gallery.



In ten, small oil paintings on panel, Gipe depicts romantic and shadow-filled images of powerful train engines, propeller airplanes, and marching soldiers in a dark, unified palette of heavy browns and murky grays.

California based artist, Lawrence Gipe, is an art instructor at the University of Santa Barbara, CA, and has had recent solo shows in New York, California, Arizona, and Illinois. The works are part of his "Arrivals and Departures" series, which continues the artist's long time interest in the art related to political propaganda of totalitarian regimes.

In Panel No. 1, a majestic silhouette of a large propeller plane is gently framed by a dreamy sunset, an image appropriate for the cover of a romance novel. Like the others works in the series, the painting is well crafted in careful brushstrokes and carry a comfortable ambiance of a past era.

Interest for the work is primarily generated conceptually, when the viewer is asked to consider the image's unexpected source, and the significance of Gipe's decision to modify their presentation into beautiful art.

Gipe paints from historical black and white photographs plucked from their original momentous and often grave context. His trains are based on World War II-era European photographs, the airplanes from a series of images taken during the Korean War, others from the Cold War U.S.S.R. No longer simply beautiful, relaxing images, one looks for evidence they were once symbols of war and industrialization. Detaching them from their original context and inserting them into a 21st century commercial art gallery is an interesting start, but a personal interest in war history may be needed to advance and broaden these works further.