

3rd Anniversary Issue

artscope

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New England's Culture Magazine

Street savvy: Shepard Fairey at ICA Boston and Kayrock & Wolfy at UMass Lowell

Perfectly abstract: Béatrice Dauge Kaufmann at Swissnex Boston and Nicole Duennebier in New Britain

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NEW/NOW THE AMALGAMATE: NICOLE DUENNEBIER

New Britain Museum of American Art
56 Lexington Street
New Britain, Connecticut

It is chaos.

Through April 26

Woods of dusk and smoky brown shadows. A felled tree, ribbon of encircling red attracting moths, butterflies, caterpillars, dragonflies. Willowy and near transparent in the nighttime wilderness, they are greedy, festering, chewing. At the edge of the swirling feast, lizards — tongues lolling, bellies fat, gulping larvae.

Entitled "Tumult," this is a scene of life and death; growth and decay; beauty and revulsion. Its creator, young artist Nicole Duennebier, who graduated from the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and the Maine College of Art and now lives in Somerville, Mass., explores such contradictions of the natural world in this exhibition. Her 21 canvases share a muted and dank color scheme: rust-charred reds, rotting browns, murky greens. The few bursts of vibrancy act as highlighters



— flamboyant coral or crimson — and represent the rarity and fleeting quality of beauty.

"Caviar Snare," for instance, draws eyes with a formless, floating elegance of luminescent red caviar. Beneath it, in a rot of brown, shadows of antennae bugs and slugs crawl and creep. Upon closer inspection, more can be seen in the haze — amoebas, crustaceans, moths; reddish-green shadows and whispers in a dank rust. As evidenced here, "beauty," after all, is an ideal manufactured by man — such perfection can't possibly exist without a counterbalance. Within the natural world, beauty is forever intertwined with the grotesque.

In addition to stressing this point, Duennebier's creations are amorphous — shifting and alive. Similarly, none harbor any inherent sense of time or place. They are shapes in the dark, some perhaps under the sea; others maybe pulsating, indescribable forms in the galaxy.

"Star of Thelma" could be quite literally above the viewers' head — it appears as an undulating chandelier. Or, on the other hand, a stylized sea anemone. Across the painting, yellow and green pearls fall in tiers; others spread out beyond view like tentacles. Below, transparent bubbles and multicolored bull's-eyes list away in a green-black density.

This creation demonstrates one of the artist's best talents: an ability to capture motion. In "Orange-Blue Spinner," similarly, a swirling disc of various, cascading levels seemingly rotates in orange, blue, turquoise, green and yellow. Like a fiber optic toy or a space ship, it is dancing, paint dripping, as if it moves too fast to hold color.



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Some of Duennebier's most intriguing pieces, however, are untitled — as if even the artist herself couldn't sum up their subtleties in a word. In one, a mountainous form of caviar rests on a base of feathers tugged by a current or breeze. A blue-white swirl above could represent the sky — or it could be the dancing waves of an ocean. Duennebier once again left the paint to drip, further representing deterioration and leaving it unfinished, a sentence without a period, forever in flux, just as nature itself.

Elsewhere in the exhibit: rotting mushrooms sprawl across some dark, musty place; floral bouquets melt; and "fancy breed pigeons" appear as anything but the scourge of city sidewalks — dramatic collars of downy white and coral feathers, heads high and arrogant. At the base of the skinny, knobby legs of one: enormous bugs stockpiled for a later feast, a proud kill lifeless on their backs, wings dull, legs stiff and curled.



LEFT PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT: *Untitled*, 2008, acrylic on panel.
Orange Blue Spinner, 2008, acrylic on panel.
ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: *Heat Apparition Study*, 2007, acrylic on panel.
Brilliant Growth, 2008, acrylic on panel.

Herein lies the contradiction: as much as decay and deterioration dampen our ideal of beauty, there can be, at the same time, a beauty and a grace in death.

| Taryn Plumb