

Fort Point Arts show says everything with flowers

As one would expect, with a title like "Say It With Flowers: An Exhibition of Work by Four Artists, Jennifer Amadeo-Holl, Anne Beresford, Sheila Gallagher and Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz," flowers are the subject of each of the artist's works. Gallagher photographs them, Spatz-Rabinowitz

VISUAL ARTS Mary Sherman

and Amadeo-Holl paint them and Beresford paints and evokes them with words on aluminum plates.

In suitable fashion, one of the walls is also washed in a luscious, pale green, which greatly enlivens the whole exhibit.

Beresford's work is the simplest in execution, but the most experimental in terms of materials used. In essence, two distinct bodies of work are on exhibit.

One group is made up of aluminum plates. In these, Beresford uses a very floral — almost unreadable — writing style to etch onto the plates such famous texts such as Shakespeare's "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

In all these cases, the words are easier to read because they've been filled in with ink. The luster

of the aluminum causes different surface effects when viewed from different angles, which creates a handsome but limited effect.

Beresford's other body of work consists of flowers delicately painted with a waxy yellow substance onto large sheets of paper. In the best works, such as "Poppy Parade," the flowers and the sensitive way in which the paint is transparent in some areas and opaque in others brilliantly suggest the tender frailty of her subject's transient beauty.

Spatz-Rabinowitz's flowers are more hardily painted, although they are often depicted just past the peak of their prime.

Using a technique for which she is well-known, Spatz-Rabinowitz paints hyperreal imagery onto faded-looking backgrounds that suggest crumbling walls or dark mysterious earth.

In "Peonies in Progress" titular, pale flowers stand out in contrast to an earthlike backdrop.

In "Wall Peonies," flowers against a fading white ground also gain vibrancy by contrast.

The real dazzle here is Spatz-Rabinowitz's adept technical skill and the way in which she makes the most of her materials to sug-

gest life's temporal nature.

Gallagher's photographs are more cerebral. Although their imagery is by nature lush — hundreds of flowers are placed side by side and then photographed in exquisite detail — a lot of that quality is lost in the translation from reality to photography.

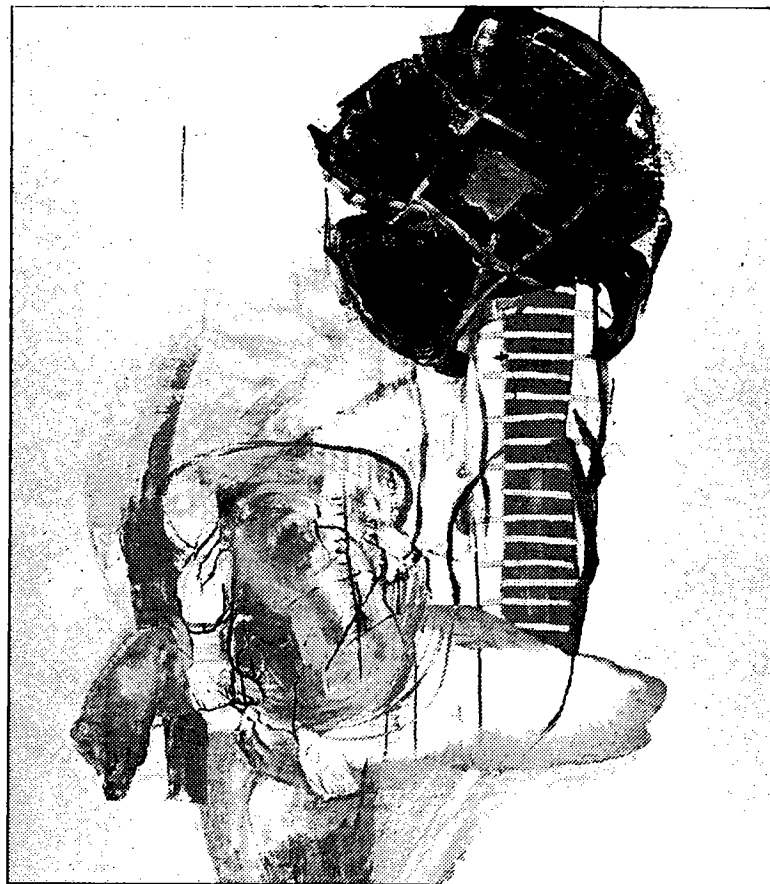
Further distancing takes place with Gallagher's composition of the flowers into impressionist and post-impressionist images.

For instance, "Monet in the 21st Century" is an arrangement of flowers suggesting Monet's paintings, and "Detail From 'La Grande Jatte'" substitutes flowers for Georges Seurat's pointillist daubs of colors, while ignoring Seurat's optical interests.

The result is certainly clever and fun, but not nearly as serious as the work by the two artists to which Gallagher refers.

The real knockout in the show is Amadeo-Holl's painting. From the empty space in which her large stalklike image emerges, "Tuber-less Listening" descends into a cacophony of patterns, marks, textures and paint-handling to create a marvelous synthesis of visual energy. With its layerings left exposed, one sees Amadeo-Holl's confidence with paint.

The give-and-take between her and the image's emergence on the canvas, alternating with finely tuned areas such as the large flower's colorful underpinnings, is never fussy, but always fresh.



LISTEN CAREFULLY: 'Tuber-less Listening,' by Jennifer Amadeo-Holl, creates a cacophony of textures and visual energy.

Amadeo-Holl also acknowledges the surrealist genesis of her abstract expressionist techniques with her addition of a finely painted foot, placed within the left side of the canvas.

To top it all off, Amadeo-Holl reminds us of painting's artifice by, surprisingly, adding contrasting black bands around the painting's borders. It's a brilliant touch — mindful of the work's historical

precedents — contrasting Amadeo-Holl's expressionist attacks with a precise and rational line.

"Say It With Flowers: An Exhibition of Work by Four Artists, Jennifer Amadeo-Holl, Anne Beresford, Sheila Gallagher and Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz" at the Fort Point Arts Community Gallery, Boston, through Jan. 23.