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Writing Sample – Essay

### A Review of *Collected Memories*

The exhibit *Collected Memories* currently being shown at the Studio San Giuseppe Art Gallery, at the College Mount St. Joseph, features three artists; James Grubola, Kay Polson Grubola and Mary Ann Currier. All these artists are residents of Louisville, Kentucky and the similarities seem to end there. However, they all share a very detailed and investigative approach to observing nature in their work. They also shared an ability to juxtapose man-made objects with organic forms.

James Grubola studied metal point at Wayne State University in Detroit. There his instructor recommended a book titled *The Craft of Old Master Drawers*. This book detailed the practice of silver point. James Grubola's analytical grace is visible in his metal point drawings. His delicate silver point lines are soft, but he spares no detail. Silver point drawings are done with a sharpened piece of metal wire (silver, gold, bronze or copper) on a gesso-like prepared surfaced. The surface is abrasive and needs to be harder than metal. This type of drawing was invented in the middle ages for book keeping because silver point is non-erasing.

Some of James Grubola's works include hand drawn grids resembling graph paper. Elements of astronomy can be found in James Grubola's compositions, complete with star charts and pages from Edwin Hubble's Notebook. The piece of James Grubola that piqued my curiosity was one of the first pieces you see when you enter the gallery. The piece is entitled, *Uranometria Series: Ursa Minor*, and it doesn't look too different from the other James Grubola pieces in the gallery. This piece was drawn in graphite. The graphite lines are so fine you can't make out the image and it lures you in. A drawn star chart is centered flush with the top of the page and is framed with a drawn striped pattern. An image of a plum bob seems to dangle in the left side of the piece giving it a feeling of suspended elements of nature surrounding the star

chart. Drawn objects like feathers and twigs lay sparingly across the foreground. A drawn piece of string is intertwined with itself as it spreads across the top of the piece. Faintly drawn are what appears to be cards with classical women drawn on them emerging from the background. A centaur is also seen emerging next to the woman. An unusual element can be seen in the piece. It is that of an upside down fuzzy tailed mammal that seems to have just slipped into the composition offering a delightful surprise and sense of whimsy.

The artwork of Kay Polson Grubola, wife of James Grubola, consists of nature-inspired collages arranged in very inorganic ways. Most arrangements are in repetitive grid patterns with the organic forms. The organic objects are mounted to a clean white background, usually with silk thread. The objects are allowed to ‘float’ and excess thread spills down the paper. The natural coloration of these found objects is accentuated against the white background. These arrangements remind one of how a biologist may keep their collected specimens, in neat rows under glass.

The piece that calls my attention is entitled *Blighted*, it consists of Hawthorn leaves, silk chiffon and thread. Like the majority of Kay Polson Grubola’s pieces the title is also accompanied by a poem: “an innocent host/ duped by cunning predators/ fades into early death”. This haiku is a clue to Kay Polson Grubola’s motivation for the piece. The leaves are arranged in two stacked rows. The top row has six leaves and the bottom row contains five leaves. The leaves glow with the hues of autumn. Soft yellows, oranges and reds offer warmth to the piece. The leaves themselves have little dark spots on them.

The artist creates something that requires careful observation. It deceives your perception and upon closer inspection, you see that she has unexpectedly replicated some of the leaves using the silk chiffon and placed the silk leaves deceptively in the arrangement. She offers clues to the

deceit by placing two plain pieces of chiffon on either side of the bottom row. This replication of the leaves requires a keen eye for the details of nature.

Mary Ann Currier evokes a sensation of delight when viewing her pastel still-lives. Her pieces offer such sophisticated detailing, but they still remain warm and avoid becoming sterile.

The pieces are like invitations to reach out and touch the silky flesh of a rose petal or sample one of the fruits in her still-lives. Currier captures her subjects' surfaces so accurately that you feel the life and dimensions of them. One way she does this is by paying close attention to the texture and reflective surfaces of the objects. The result is that her oil pastels don't feel like still-lives but more like snippets of her life.

One of the pieces in the exhibition is a deceptively ordinary scene, entitled *Mushrooms in a box*. On a dark blue background a clear plastic store container is overflowing with mushrooms. The fresh white mushrooms appear soft and fleshy. Each mushroom also has the same photo-realistic detailing. Each gill shows the viewer that this is life. The plastic container the mushrooms come in is very contemporary, it is something relatable. I buy the same containers at the grocery store filled with the same mushrooms, but it wasn't until now that I really saw the mushrooms.

These artists share the same sensitivity to detail. Each artist's ability to observe nature as shown through their works is uncanny. Through their keen skills of observation they are able to seamlessly blend man-made objects with organic ones. James Grubola accomplishes this by depicting miniature hand-made ladders constructed with raw organic materials. Kay Grubola arranged her organic materials in man-made designs, like grids. She also incorporates man-made replicas that mimic the organic materials. Currier was able to take organic forms and display them in very contemporary man-made containers in her still lifes. Each work also shares

something personal about themselves with the viewers through their work. This exhibition is definitely a visual treat and should not be missed.

The Studio San Giuseppe Art is located at the College of Mount St. Joseph, 5701 Delhi Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45233. The Collective Memories Exhibition is open from September 18<sup>th</sup> – October 23<sup>rd</sup>. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. They are also open on Saturdays and Sundays from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. The Gallery is closed on major holidays. Admission to the gallery is free.