

# WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

Sunday, March 11, 2007  
www.journalnow.com \$1.25

Serving Winston-Salem, Forsyth County and all of Northwest North Carolina

## VISUAL ARTS



Visitors to the Hanes Gallery in Wake Forest's Scales Fine Arts Center learn through photographs about the life of Gordon Brinckle, who turned his basement into an old-fashioned movie theater.

JOURNAL FILE PHOTO

## Old Ways and Newer

*Exhibits at WFU shine a light on the past and reflect experiments with new techniques*

Kendall Messick's art is very different from Susan Brenner's, but the two artists have at least a couple of things in common. They have solo exhibitions through next Sunday at Wake Forest University's Hanes Art Gallery, and photography plays a key role in their work.

That role is overt, in and central to, Messick's work, as represented in "The Projectionist," his highly engaging show about a man who built and operated an elaborate, old-fashioned movie theater in the basement of his otherwise ordinary home in Middletown, Del.

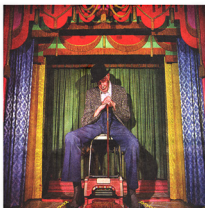


Tom Patterson

Gordon Brinckle, 91, began building his "Alvin Shalimar Theater" in 1959 as a more intimately scaled version of the single-screen "movie palaces" that thrived in this country during the early to mid-20th century. Brinckle equipped it with 16-millimeter projectors, an electric organ, nine theater seats, four curtains, a marquee and a ticket office.

Messick, a 1987 graduate of Wake Forest who lives in Jersey City, N.J., spent four years photographing and filming Brinckle and his home theater. The exhibition showcases the results of his efforts, including 40 photographs and a 25-minute film. It also has early photos of Brinckle and some of his art and artifacts. But its centerpiece is the theater itself, or at least a substantial portion of it, which Messick had removed from Brinckle's basement for reassembly in exhibition venues. Close inspection reveals lots of clever and unusual decorative details, such as kitschy, strategically placed plastic dog, deer and bird figurines. A digital projector repeatedly shows Messick's film about Brinckle on the theater's screen.

The film provides a touchingly intimate, sometimes humorous look at Brinckle's life, emphasizing his longtime fascination with movie theaters and the more than 40 years he spent working in them, most often as a film projectionist. Most of the film is set in the Shalimar Theater, where Brinckle wears dapper but chromatically loud clothes that match the theater's predominantly red color scheme — talks about his life and his experience in movie theaters. Messick's footage, which includes scenes filmed in other parts of Brinckle's home, is strategically intercut with snippets of his-



Kendall Messick, a Wake Forest graduate, created the traveling show about Brinckle.

JOURNAL FILE PHOTO

torical footage from Brinckle's collection. Brinckle also wears flamboyant outfits in Messick's large-format color photographs, in which he strikes reflective poses on or near the Shalimar's stage, or appears occupied with the business of operating the theater.

Messick's black-and-white photos, fewer in number, share the same large format, but they're set in the ordinarily furnished upstairs rooms of his house or in and around his yard. Brinckle wears more casual, everyday clothes in these images. The distinction effectively reflects the contrast between the rather mundane life he shares with his wife, Dot, and the glamour and excitement he obviously still associates with movie theaters, including his own.

Messick's photos, particularly those in color, might be a little more numerous than they need to be, but that's a minor quibble about what generally stacks up as an outstanding, historically valuable, not to mention highly unusual, show. Its historical and collaborative dimensions are enhanced by old photos of Brinckle in a theater usher's uniform as well as old projector lenses, a film splicer and other artifacts from Brinckle's collection of movie-theater paraphernalia. Further highlighting Brinckle's own creativity and design skills are his 11 theater drawings and floor plans dating from the 1930s and '40s, his self-designed, hand-printed tickets and theater programs, and his design for an usher's uniform, all of which reflect the influences of his early vocational-school art studies and an appren-

ticeship with a movie-theater designer. If you haven't seen Messick's show yet, it's well worth going out of your way during its last week on view.

Brenner's exhibition in the upstairs portion of the gallery is considerably smaller and more understated. It consists of 13 recent, formally related paintings that range in size from about 16-by-20 inches up to 6-by-4 feet. Their series title, "After Migration," refers to a series of photographically derived digital prints she made earlier, titled "Migrations."

With these two series Brenner, who is an associate professor of art at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, appears to have set up a formal experiment in the relationship between digital imagery and old-fashioned painting. She evidently began the process by making photographs of various objects and/or scenes, then computer-scanned these images so that she could digitally distort and otherwise transform them into almost purely abstract configurations of color and shape. According to an essay on her work by Paul Bright, the gallery's assistant director, which is posted in the exhibit, these paintings are directly based on the resultant digital photographs, which made up the early series.

Details in several of the paintings suggest that their photographic starting points were essentially still-lives, although the only objects in them that haven't been morphed and distorted beyond recognition are the lengths of braided rope that appear in a few of them. Otherwise, their painted shapes and forms look as if they've been melted, stretched, pulled and bent to produce rather psychically chaotic-looking compositions whose generally restrained color schemes incorporate a lot of fleshy pinks and other pastels alongside darker, moodier browns and greens. Passages in several of them are reminiscent of marbled paper. A few of them call to mind woody landscapes, while others are more viscerally organic-looking. Their more painterly, textural qualities distinguish them sharply from the flat digital images on which they're based. After looking at them for a while, you're likely to forget about trying to discern any representational content in them.

■ The Hanes Art Gallery is in the Scales Fine Arts Center, off Reynolds Road on the campus of Wake Forest University. For more information, phone 759-5585.