



"Assassin of the Rocks" by Matthew Mann, from Gross McCleaf's midsummer tonic.

Four artists, four "rings" at Gross McCleaf.

Gallery's invitation: Come to the 'Circus'

By Victoria Donohoe
FOR THE INQUIRER

How to avoid a "new talent" presentation dominated by conventional thinking and tastes? Gross McCleaf discovered how to liven things up in midsummer by presenting "Four-Ring Circus."

This four-painter show features two artists, Matthew Mann and Jay Noble, who drumbeat for their surprisingly vivid expressions of anxiety. And that's a curious, even touching counterpoint to the trait of American optimism so appealing to Europeans, yet at the same time so maddening to them.

Mann's work, though finely detailed, has a bucking, headstrong energy, releasing a thespian side of his character as well as a concern with narrative. Shot through with dramatic touches that offer dark intimations, is some sort of bloody government overthrow under way?

These colorful fantasies by the Washington, D.C., artist exhale a mysterious aura. And although they convey no specific sense of place, there's a flicker or a nudge here for me of Old Spain's conquests and more recent events occurring in certain Central American republics.

There's more of the common clay of humanity in the circus paintings by Noble, of Lancaster. But these aren't pleasantly nostalgic

scenes. Instead, it's mayhem at the circus and the home front, with a gorilla and tiger, no longer docile creatures, taking over control from their handlers, and an angry dog trampling a child in an otherwise upscale urban domestic setting.

Seemingly casually painted but done over an extended period, these semiabstract works bristle with raw energy, which serves well Noble's rollicking ideas.

Victoria Barnes of Philadelphia, daughter of well-known painters, shows domestic tabletop still-lives that definitely have a tonic quality — most evident in her superb oil *Deer and Polka-Dot Cloth*.

Barnes favors a muted palette in work conveying a sense of the somewhat depleted abundance of certain well-worn, cherished tableware. Shapes that emerge in these paintings are surprisingly, and impressively, robust.

Dorothy Frey of Lancaster evolved from an open-air painter to another kind of exposition of truth to nature in her intense oils of trees. Sympathetically and handsomely painted with a deft touch, they have an air of almost solemn hush.

Gross McCleaf Gallery, 127 S 16th. To July 24. Mon-Fri 10-5. Free. Reception today 5-7. 215-665-8138.

Anniversary

"The American Center for the Contemporary Artists" group show.

Thirteen miles from eight states celebrates DC's anniversary, offering a look at the eyes of artists on answering a question: do we see our

Subjects explored slavery and at a piece by Whitney (Roger Shimomura) and Meagan Sheinman, culture problems.

Also explored American (Tom) and the notion of Anderson, Am

Several artists issue in this two-ed into "People that's a unifier. ful outreach a exhibits that a

Delaware Center S Madison, Wilmington. 10-5, Wed & Sun



Tom Birkner's "Delaware Center

Solo at Blue

Philadelphia show "Figure Streak Gallery just a mere st

Deep, dark figures inhabiting charcoal. Is he tive, hitting th again, and abn rectness, though vating these g

Blue Streak Gallery Wilmington. To V 10-4. Free. 302-4