

Rachel Wolfson Smith draws contemporary cautionary tales

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By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin - American-Statesman Staff

There's a rollicking chaos to Rachel Wolfson Smith's expressive — and enormous — graphite drawings now on view at Grayduck Gallery.

In sweeping scenes, Smith renders classic cautionary tales using contemporary imagery. Cars and motorcycles replace horses and chariots. And helmeted motorcycle riders, racing numbers on their backs, are Smith's soldiers.

Smith deliberately mimics Renaissance battle scene paintings, delightfully marshaling all the histrionic pageantry and epic drama common to the genre.

Her trio of large-scale drawings called "Uccello" are direct reimaginings of the 15th-century three-painting suite "The Battle of San Romano" by Italian master Paolo Uccello, clashing lance-toting cavalry replaced by dirt motorcycle riders tangled in a wreck, tires protruding from the heap.

Smith's moralizing isn't the least bit subtle in the mural-size "Monsters." Rendered on six large sheets of paper tacked together, the 21-foot-long drawing wraps a corner in the gallery and depicts an ominous night scene of a horrific crash of luxury cars, a street sign for "Wrath Avenue" collapsed in the rubble.



Jeanne Claire van Ryzin
"Monsters" from a solo exhibit by Rachel Wolfson Smith at Grayduck Gallery.

There's plenty of precision to Smith's mark-making, with tiny details of vehicle parts or a rider's taunt leg exquisitely expressed. Yet there's also plenty of raw physicality to her drawing technique, with vigorous pencil marks and smudgy erasures adding a level of stylistic drama. That combination of delicacy and frenzy intrigues.

There's a gold-painted motorcycle planted at what could be either the beginning or ending of the exhibit. And it's a bit hard to determine if it adds an ironic footnote or not. Perhaps that's not important. Visually, the gold-surfaced motorcycle is fun.

Smith netted the solo show at Grayduck by winning the art competition "Eyes Got It" last year.



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As part of her solo exhibit at Grayduck Gallery, Rachel Wolfson Smith has included an off-road motorcycle, painted with gold paint.

A creation of Austin art advocate Jaime Salvador Castillo, "Eyes Got It" has artists facing increasingly tougher critiques from a panel of curators and critics in three rounds of live judging. It takes moxie for artists to explicate their work against critique in front of a live audience.

San Antonio's Cade Bradshaw won the 2016 competition just last weekend, and his show will be at Grayduck some time in 2017.

"Midas: Rachel Wolfson Smith"

When: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday through Aug. 21

Where: Grayduck Gallery, 2213 E. Cesar Chavez St.

Cost: Free

Info: 512-826-5334, grayduckgallery.com