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Two Bemis shows capture process differently

by Sarah Baker

Although the two recently opened shows at the Bemis Center may seem completely unrelated, there is a common threads: At first glance, things are not always what they seem.

Cuthbert & Solzberg: Archivists and Researchers and *Nic Nicosia: Drawing* opened in tandem earlier this month and although they are vastly different in both feel and scope, they present the viewer with interesting, engaging environments that are more than just visual. They are experiential.

Nicosia's untitled photographs and site-specific pieces fill Gallery 2; they are starkly black and white. Since the late 1970s, Nicosia has been creating work that focuses on paradox. He mixes photography, installation and painting for images that rely on trickery of the eye.

At first, the photographs look flat, but as one looks closer, it becomes clear that Nicosia has inverted drawing into a dimensional form with tromp l'oeil tactics. Suddenly, what at first looked flat now has depth.

The images confuse reality with perception and there is also confusion between the air and the space. The paint seems to explode on the walls, floor and ceilings of the rooms in the images, and the contraptions he uses in the photos to splatter the paint, including pulleys, swings and catapults, add an underlying level of performance to the stills. Some use thin sprays of paint, one image uses white paint instead of black. Nicosia also created three site-specific images directly on the walls: two smudgy, flat black circles in the gallery, one open circle in the hall and a large-scale figure of a man, also in the gallery, rendered in what looks like black paint ball splats.

This show is a significant departure for Nicosia as the 10 images explore all the different mediums he practices, and the show marks the first time he's created such site-specific installations.

For Cuthbert and Solzberg, the Bemis is a familiar stomping ground. Probably better known to Omaha art audiences as Bushwick Farms, Tara Cuthbert and Stuart Solzberg came back to the place of their former residency for this installation exhibit. They take on the roles of "archivist" and "researcher" for the project, which, in their words, aims to "reclaim, preserve and present artifacts relating to Source Energies."

The show is a bit overwhelming — especially coming from viewing the stark Nicosia galleries — because it's full of stuff, albeit neatly organized stuff. The mediums are widely varied and include embroidery, photography, video and sound, artifacts, replicas and drawing. They take their roles seriously: an archivist's job is to ensure



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the protection and management of records, historical documents and artifacts for future generations, while a researcher aims to reinterpret and trace patterns within a set parameter.

The show takes a close examination of Cuthbert and Solzberg's own work, carefully documenting it through the above means. The show most notably employs sound and video, and the soothing natural sounds fill the gallery and the adjacent hallway. The best parts for me included a full wall of drawings, which literally span ceiling to floor, the wall of embroideries, which include subjects like houses, maps and boats, and the most intricate part: a "source energies" map that draws parallels between different photographs and drawings using pins and strings. It's entrancing.

Cuthbert & Solsberg: *Archivists and Researchers* and Nic Nicosia: *Drawings continue at the Bemis Center, 12th and Leavenworth, through May 17. For more information, visit bemiscenter.org.*

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