

# Dancing dishes; rocking horse winners; affable animals

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"Unstill Life," Ilana Manolson's show of monoprints at the Randall Beck Gallery, could alternately be titled "The Secret Life of Bowls."

**Galleries** These prints, swirling with light and breathtaking color, take the domestic subject of many still lifes and set it spinning. The artist suggests in her statement that her works address the chaos of real life that belies the fragile order of a well-stocked china cabinet, but the sheer beauty of her images brings them head and shoulders above any frank discussion of disorder into the realm of magic.

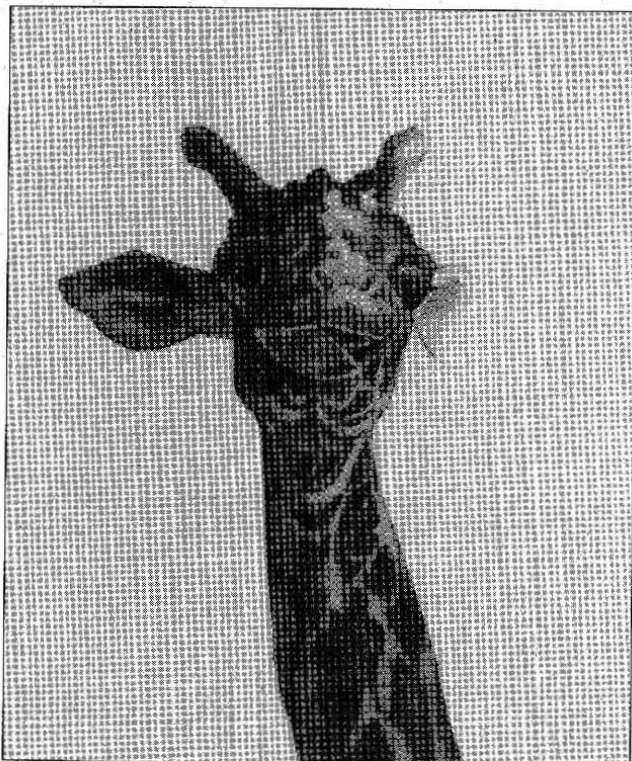
Manolson equates motion with emotion, and her prints rush and bubble breathlessly with swift brush strokes. "Tea and Tango" takes place on a rich, turquoise ground suffused with light. A dusky, periwinkle bowl rimmed with the white of the exposed paper sits near the bottom of the frame, and a golden, bubbly fire rushes out of it, both pushing and cradling a second bowl. The fire curves around the second bowl and back into it, where it cushions a mug that spins away from the bowls as a sparkling explosion of white spills from its mouth.

With tea cups flying and bowls spinning, the first thing to come to mind when looking at these prints may not be a Japanese tea ceremony, but Manolson invests her subject matter with the same kind of respect and energy that goes into just such a spinning, the first thing to come to mind when looking at these prints may not be a Japanese tea ceremony, but Manolson invests her subject matter with the same kind of respect and energy that goes into just such a Buddhist ritual. There is new life and understanding in every moment, and in the most-mundane of objects. Even dishes will dance and spark if you let them, and this artist has.

Bert Antonio is off the wall. The "Rocking Horse Paintings" at the Genovese Gallery are actually on the floor, built around small wooden and metal rocking horses.

He's on the wall, too, with diamond-shaped paintings built from tiny, inch-square units. His pieces are obsessive in their construction. Take "About Nothing, About Everything (An Act of Contrition)," built entirely from wooden rulers and painted in hard-candy colors. It turns into a rippling, multicolored grid, complete with ridges and demarcated fractions. The piece represents both object and process. It's like praying the rosary, having a single bead to focus each prayer on.

Antonio's sense of humor saves him from being bogged down in square-inch units (it does, after all, take more than bricks to build a building). "The Jagged Rainbow: If You Wish Hard Enough" is colored squares adding up to a pointy rainbow, with wishbones dangling along



Elizabeth Peak's "May I Help You?" captures the comic elegance of a giraffe in mid-chew. It is at the new Kougeas Gallery.

each section for a flight of fancy. "No More Burning Bridges," one of the rocking horse paintings, lays the same colors in columns of three on either side of a wooden rocking horse; in effect, the horse bridges a chasm the artist has created. Don't burn him, he seems to be saying; ride him.

The artist breaks free of his building blocks in a series of collaged paintings featuring the form of a horse, bucking and galloping, cut out in patterned fabric and juxtaposed with lines and bands of color that look like flags waving at a yacht race. These pieces are unframed but under glass; their diamond shape gives the sense that the horse's dance has thrown the world off its axis. And Antonio, who is 34, isn't exactly on his axis; he seems to be working inward from wildly different points. It will be interesting to see what he creates when all his trajectories come together.

Kerstin Engman fashions women from stone and metal. "The Visitation," one of the pieces in her show at the Arden Gallery, could be seen as a metaphor for her creative process. In it, a woman balances on her hips with her long legs straight up in the air; she leans her torso between her thighs and midwives the birthing of a great stone, pulling it out of her body with gentle finesse.

For Engman, the female form

ILANA MANOLSON: UNSTILL LIFE  
At: Randall Beck Gallery, 123 Newbury St., through May 11

BERT ANTONIO: ROCKING HORSE PAINTINGS  
At: Randall Beck Gallery, 123 Newbury St., through May 11

BERT ANTONIO: ROCKING HORSE PAINTINGS  
At: Genovese Gallery, 535 Albany St., through May 2

KERSTIN ENGMAN: SCULPTURES  
At: Arden Gallery, 129 Newbury St., through May 4

ARTIST'S CHOICE:  
RICHARD SHEEHAN SELECTS  
Works by Elizabeth Peak, Peter Plamondon and Howie Lee Weiss  
At: Kougeas Gallery, 88 White St., East Boston, through May 4.

doesn't comment on women's place in society. This artist doesn't push to make political points. Rather, her sculptures, large and small, are primarily vessels of dignity. "Omphalomepsis" is a woman in a woven hemp skirt, hewn from copper in a series of spheres — her skull, her chin, her breasts and swollen belly. Her large hands come together below the droop of her stomach. Her face has been fashioned from simple lines and planes. "Blue Daughters" is a bronze piece, two proud women in mid-stride with their chins in the air, one slender, one stout.

Richard Sheehan has curated a



Equating motion and emotion: Ilana Manolson's "Tea and Tango" at the Randall Beck Gallery.

small, earthy show at the Kougeas Gallery, a new venue in East Boston. Sheehan groups Peter Plamondon, known for his white-toned still lifes, with printmaker Elizabeth Peak and Howie Lee Weiss, who makes enormous, deceptively simple charcoal drawings.

Plamondon turns from white to terra cotta in his studies of pots for planting, stacked and grouped against similarly red grounds. This artist delights in the subtle shift of tones, from yellow-red to orange-red to brick, and how they play against one another in the quiet, sunny drama of his still lifes.

Peak's delicate etchings of animals bring us from the garden to the zoo. "May I Help You?" captures the comic elegance of a giraffe's face as his jaw slides to the left, mid-chew, and his almond-shaped eyes address us inquiringly. The print is a lovely contrast of lines — the horizontal flap

of ear and jaw, the vertical slant of the neck add up to a delightfully composed portrait of an affable animal.

Large, simply drawn smiling faces dominate Weiss' large, broadly drawn works, putting the viewer at ease. It's the little narratives surrounding the happy faces that hint that the artist has more on his mind than having a nice day. In one drawing, he sketches the cradle-to-grave scenario of a figure on all fours addressing a stooped man with two canes. Grids are scattered around like screens blown from a window by a hard wind, their rigid forms suggesting opposition to the roundness of his figures. Weiss executes these pieces with fragile sticks of vine charcoal, and his ability to achieve even tones in the fat outlines of his images and the smoky background is remarkable.