



This painting by Barnaby Furnas is part of the exhibit "Surveyor," on view through June 5 in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

Wow factor at the Albright-Knox

Albright-Knox shows new acquisitions in bold fashion

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The Albright-Knox Art Gallery has been shopping.

And with "Surveyor," the latest in a series of exhibitions meant to introduce some big, bold new acquisitions to the rest of the family, the gallery is out to impress.

The show, which opened Feb. 18 and runs through June 5, begins in stunning fashion in the gallery's sculpture court with Zhan Wang's sprawling cityscape sculpture. The shimmering metropolis of stainless steel, which grows out of a series of thick steel plates spread across much of the gallery floor, is constructed almost entirely from cooking equipment.

There are skyscrapers of room service trays capped off with teapot chimneys, slim columns of stacked cheese graters, massive towers of coffee containers and double-boilers. Further out from the downtown core, the landscape gives way to neat rows of sugar bowls and teapots separated by winding streets of ladles, serving spoons, tongs and spatulas. And at the center, a craggy, silver rock formation rises above all the buildings — presumably the material from which this city was formed. Wang's piece provides food for thought about urban planning, about our harvesting and transformation of the environment, and about conversations between east

and west. But it also provides a pretty great opportunity to gawk.

The same room features Gary Simmons' arresting painting "D. C. Pavilion," a canvas of impossibly rich vermilion with what appears to be a Japanese structure, rendered in white wax, rising from the lower-left and giving off wisps of white smoke. That's next to Barnaby Furnas' 2007 painting "Flood," in which the artist has painstakingly re-created the look of blood streaked across a clear surface — an arresting visual which the artist himself will be on hand to explain during a talk in the gallery at 8 tonight.

Across the room is Matthew Ritchie's abstraction "Morning War," as apocalyptic as advertised, though it is surrounded by a made-to-order wall drawing and floor sculpture that seem to draw away some of the concentrated visual power it might have had by itself.

The really interesting sections of "Surveyor" come out in the other rooms, for which curator Heather Pesanti invited five regional artists to weave their work in with pieces from the gallery's collection. The results are often surprising and enchanting.

The two rooms that captivated me by far the most were those featuring work by Millie Chen and Peter Stephens. Chen's exhibition, divided between two rooms, is both elegant and straightforwardly jarring. In the first room, she exhibits 15th-century etchings by the French artist Jacques Collot that depict the horrors of war and corporal punishment of the time. Whereas Goya's famous "Disasters of War" concentrates on single acts usually at close range, Collot depicts the violence from a distance and includes the surrounding landscapes.

In the second room, Chen has reproduced the etchings in large-scale on the walls, but she has removed all human figures, leaving the battlefields, torture chambers and hanging trees intact. She seems to ask whether anyone remembers the violence at all, or whether it simply fades back into the landscape only to rise again in new forms.

Stephens, a Buffalo painter whose work is bound up with the mysteries of the infinite and the infinitesimal, creates alluring paintings that might be the surface of some distant moon or the surface of a microscopic cell — or both. His works pair beautifully with Rene Magritte's ominous, enthralling 1928 painting of alien orbs, "La Voix des airs (The Voice of Space)," Vija Celmins' 2010 "Starfield" and Mary Bauermeister's strangely alluring 1965 curio box of strange orbs and sketched figures, called "Four Quart-er-s." This room is a perfectly calibrated quintet, in which all the players have produced alluring documents of their fascination with the infinite. •

REVIEW

WHO: "Surveyor"

WHEN: Through June 5

WHERE: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1285 Elmwood Ave.