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'The Paper Project' worth trip to Museum for Youth

Roberta Burnett
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Arizona Museum for Youth, Segura Fine Art, Mesa Contemporary Arts and the ASU Art Museum are the crown jewels of contemporary fine arts in the southeast Valley. These institutions hold their own against fine galleries in Scottsdale, Carefree and downtown Phoenix.

Of these, the unique Arizona Museum for Youth is the most understated. Well-attended by schoolkids and active with workshops, AZMY changes shows roughly twice a year. But it is worthy of more than two visits a year, because it exhibits real contemporary art that makes no excuses and exhibits no coyness. It's not filled with commercial art targeted at children.

Boringly named, its current "Show of Color" is exciting. It's segmented by genre or artist into many small exhibits so visitors can focus on the prints of Larry Yanez, the ceramic sculpture of Esmeralda de Lacey, the paintings of b royalty, the dichronic glasswork of Joyce Van Loben Sels, the handmade quilted art of Marla Hattabaugh or art from ASU's Neon Workshop.

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A sufficient number of works by each - and often their best work from private collections - are clustered as if for a solo show, the size of many in Scottsdale galleries, where some of these artists show.

Rebecca Akins is the curator for the museum. She conceives of shows and finds the works. Here, she has done a terrific job.

What blew my corks, though, was the wall works and the room-size environment of "The Paper Project," a team of collaborating artists including papermaker Gene Valentine, visual artist and biologist C.J. Kazilek, choreographer Jennifer Tsukayama, and composer and musician Kristofer T. Hill. Credit also goes to media/digital artist collaborator Patricia Clark.

One panel of wall works shows the paper Valentine makes of a wide variety of fibers and directly above each the same paper with a sample image applied to it. On another wall is larger art with the imagery of Kazilek on Valentine's paper, made three-dimensional through the use of paper "3D" glasses the museum supplies.

These works are amazing. Their complex imagery, seen with the naked eye, is blurry and difficult to absorb because the images are self-bordered with another overall pattern. But using the glasses viewers see deep into the image.

Walk into a room, and the similar images cover a much larger space, the whole back wall of a room and parts of two other sides.

Music plays, and out from the right side jut five long panels of fabric. Hanging from an overhead bar is another, wider band of fabric, this time with cutouts. A fan blows the fabric so it moves. The lighting changes and while the image doesn't change, the effect of it does.

When viewers take the offered scarves from the opposite wall and wave them, they become dancers and their clothes become additional screens, adding real depth to the illusion of depth.

Arizona Museum for Youth, 35 N. Robson St., Mesa, is open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$3.50 for everyone 2 and older. Information: (480) 644-2468 or www.ci.mesa.az.us/amfy/ The 0/020Gallery.asp.

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