

ART REVIEW: **Art, Craft and Modern Mischief** - BOSTON-BASED ARTIST ELIZABETH ALEXANDER METICULOUSLY BLENDS CRAFT, CONCEPT, SCULPTURE AND INSTALLATION IDEAS IN 'MARY MARY'

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent

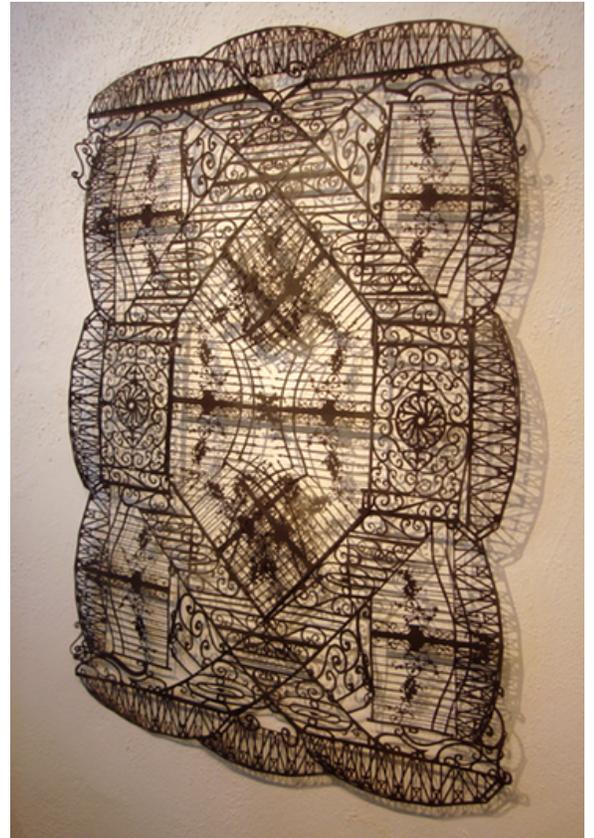
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ART REVIEW

Elizabeth Alexander | *Mary Mary*

When: through April 26

In the deceptively calm and deceptively decorative new exhibition at Jane Deering Gallery, Elizabeth Alexander's *Mary Mary*, what you see is not necessarily what you get. Key word, 'necessarily.'



Lace 2013 Paper, graphite power, glue
36 x 28 inches

This patient and redefinition-seeking Boston-based artist is ostensibly working into the sculptural and installation art modes, using paper and porcelain sources that have been meticulously cut, reshaped, artfully defaced and sometimes slyly mimic material realities as something other than what they are. The Deering gallery show sports artworks, from an elaborate faux lace table runner as gallery centerpiece to intricate paper-constructed 'still lifes' -- suitable subjects and a blackened paper piece that evokes ornate ironwork; it seduces the eye through the detailed precision of its X-acto knife artistry and beneath-the-surface themes at hand.

It helps to get some contextual back story on Ms. Alexander, who earned her MFA at the respected Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, and studied art in Scotland and France, but has also been an ironworker, like her father before her. She translates that facility fascination with challenging physical materials to work with -- a spectrum running from iron to paper, in the fastidious degrees she demands -- to create dazzlingly, dizzyingly handcrafted cutout pieces.



Bowl of fruit 2012 . Paper, glue, wood . 15x15x16 inches

Apart from the quietly mischievous table setting in the gallery, with its echoing imagery of a fanciful building and abstracted decorative filigree, she ups the ante of her paper-mastery with paper sculptures of a fruit bowl replete with fruits, and, on the gallery's back wall, ropy lengths of sausage and a full-scaled life-deprived pheasant. The objects and subjects themselves are perfectly fitting fodder for 19th-century still life and trompe l'oeil painters, here transformed into a post-modernist twist via her papery art supply of choice.

A series of early art school-era pieces finds her deploying her cut-out methodology to both process-minded and metaphorical ends, by taking pages from a vintage botany book and carefully excising the beautiful plant subject from the surrounding framing -- removing the content from its context, to create a subverted relationship of positive/negative, and figure/ground.

Right: **Italian Flowers #4** . Collaged photogravure prints .
11 1/2 x 10 1/4 inches



Beyond the realm of her fine (in more than one way) paper art, we also find a few examples of her deconstructionist reworking of delicate pieces of china, which have been shamelessly and quite arduously and time-consumptively, subjected to carved-out revisions and image impositions. her intricate design, whose blackness triggers association with metal work, somehow neatly also triggers longing for craft and physicality of bygone eras, as local as the soon-to-be-demolished corrugated metal-exterior blacksmith/ironwork building and property just down a few blocks on Anacapa Street.



Magnolia Warbler 2014 . hand-cut bone china (found object) . 4 x 4 x 4 inches

Somehow, lurking behind the vague and harmless audacity of her end results are deposits of wistful melancholy, and also dry humor. She alludes to some imagined and hinted-at elegance of being that has been lost or diminished in this digitalized age. The art also suggests a kind of inherently vulnerable social decorum, conveyed through tellingly fragile mediums -- easily torn or burnt paper, defaced precious china, and emblems of imperiled antiquity and order. Beauty is at hand, and at risk.

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Where: Jane Deering Gallery . 128 E. Canon Perdido Street

Hours: 11am to 5pm Tuesday-Saturday . Information: janedeeringgallery.com . 805-966-3334