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At Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, three shows examine the evolution of memory

For just \$2 admission, you can see this trio of concise, sharply focused exhibitions



Kristopher Wright's "Summer Cypress," one of his large-scale pieces installed on the walls at BMOCA. Photo by Ray Mark Rinaldi, Special to The Denver Post

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With its trio of concise and sharply focused exhibitions featuring regional talents, the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art stretches its run as the most interesting place to see fresh and important work from Colorado artists.

While the larger museums here continue to pay only token attention to artists in their midsts — and that includes both the taxpayer-funded Denver Art Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver — their smaller peer to the north has been employing its curating team to make offerings that showcase top-notch artmaking while helping Colorado creatives develop their skills, careers and connections to local audiences.

Even better is that BMoCA extends that generosity to visitors. It charges just \$2 for admission.



Kristopher Wright's source materials are photos of domestic and social scenes that connect to his upbringing. This church scene is titled "Circle Be Unbroken." Photo by Ray Mark Rinaldi, Special to The Denver Post

In truth, BMoCA exhibitions do not always go as deep as DAM or MCA shows; the museum does not have the staff or resources. But under director David Dadone it has found a voice that feels sophisticated and worldly while having a distinct and respectful sense of place.

Artist Kristopher Wright's rich, solo turn in "Just As I Am," set up in the museum's East Gallery, is a good example. The exhibition is a surprise even to folks who pay attention to the art scene here because it shines a light on a regional printmaker and painter whose proficiency appears to be quickly on the rise.

Wright, who was raised in Denver, moved away for a bit to hone his education and then returned, eventually settling near Salida. He has developed a technique for his large-scale, two-dimensional works that is technically forward while retaining a distinctly hand-made feel.

But he starts as a painter, working on canvases that are hung on the wall and applying blocks of blues, yellows and reds that serve as a sort of template for his prints.

He then transfers the canvases to the floor, where he prints the photos in black ink on top of his painting. In a sense, the paint underneath “colorizes” the photos. The works are then returned to the wall for viewers to experience.



But Wright is not just doing photo reproductions here. These blocks of color do not always line up with the photos, leaving things a bit murky for the viewer; the colors feel exaggerated, encouraging viewers to look at them as more than documents of the past.

Wright then goes a bit further, adding in objects like vases of flowers or bowls of fruit that weren't necessarily in the photos but exaggerate the feeling of domesticity. On top of that, he might paint in line drawings that resemble the machine diagrams you see in an automotive repair manual.

These are, by and large, optimistic works, about family and happy times gone by, about the simple joys of working on the car or getting a haircut at the barbershop on the corner. But they also deal in the evolution of memory, the complex workings of family and social dynamics, about what lies beneath the surface of a simple snapshot.

Personal experience is also at the heart of Erin Hyunhee Kang's "A Home In Between," set up in BMoCA's tiny, second-floor Union Works Gallery. Kang's photo collages were born of her own trauma as a victim of the 2021 Marshall Fire that ravaged hundreds of homes in Boulder County,

It's always dangerous territory when an artist takes on the topic of a current tragedy, and many times artists fail. Works can feel rushed and overly sentimental or dramatic; personally indulgent rather than resonant to a whole community. Art takes more time to make than these situations generally allow.

But Kang hits it in ways that are both sensational and intimate. By creating cut-and-paste collages of photos she took after the destruction, she can choose to include details that matter and reframe the narrative of the fire in ways that go beyond how local media reported it and that add emotional depth to the story.



Erin Hyunhee Kang's photo collage "No One Cares But You." The image is projected on the wall at BMoCA. Image provided by Erin Hyunhee Kang.

In the piece "No one Cares But You," she presents a vista that has cows and horses grazing in a pasture, a docile scene that evokes the rural romance of the region. But in the background, she has collaged in an ominous column of smoke billowing angrily into the sky that disrupts the tranquil scene and commemorates the awfulness that followed the flames. The piece evokes the shock and awe all of us felt that day when a place we thought was safe turned to cinders.

Kang lets the drama fly in these works, but it does not feel over the top. Just the opposite. The tension was genuine during the Marshall Fire and the destruction that followed lingered for a long time, disrupting normality and destroying security.

The installation of this exhibition is nearly perfect. The work is edited down to what matters, and photos are shown only in digital projections that fill the gallery's walls. There is a fragility to the works, a lack of permanency and stability, that aptly reflects the fragility of everyday life Kang explores.

Similarly to the other two, the third exhibition at BMoCA deals in reconstructed memory and the tricks that photos can play as vessels for our memories. Artists Kevin Hoth and George P. Perez both start with actual photos they have taken, found or randomly collected, and then deconstruct and reassemble them to create pieces that have new meanings or ask us to see them in different ways.



George P. Perez taped together photographic prints for these paired works. They are part of the show "Plane of Action" at BMoCA. Photo by Ray Mark Rinaldi, Special to The Denver Post

They have distinct processes and source materials in this paired exhibition: Hoth uses, to a large extent, the instant film from Polaroid cameras; Perez mines printed photos he finds in thrift shops, and his work can get more technical here (he employs a plasma cutter at one point). But both are liberal in their cutting, shredding, burning, repositioning or in other ways removing the essence of their starting objects. Each puts things back together in a way that offers nods to other forms of artmaking, such as weaving, sewing or collaging, while questioning the things we think we know about photography itself. These are delicate, up-close works with high ambitions.

All three of the BMoCA exhibitions are photo-based but take the form to extreme places; they complement each in that way. They stand well alone, together and as an appetite-enhancer for Denver's Month of Photography, the biennial, multi-venue extravaganza of photography that kicks off across the region in March.

If you go:

The three exhibitions continue through Feb. 19 at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art,

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