

# KC STUDIO



## **“2016 Kansas City Flatfile,” H&R Block Artspace**

There are 225 regional artists in the current Flatfile show at Block Artspace. That translates to more than 1,000 works on paper in more than 30 metal file drawers, along with a changing roster of artworks on the walls selected by a rotating group of curators and hung salon style. There is also a separate room for digital works.

The Flatfile show has become a biennial event at the Artspace. Since the first one in 2001 which featured 50 artists, the exhibit has grown exponentially. The participating artists are always asked to return, and they in turn can invite other artists.

Confession: after three visits to the Flatfiles I have perused only 50 files and three digital works. Visual overload can be a hazard here; it pays to make multiple visits and savor a reasonable number of files on each one. Just put on a pair of white cotton gloves and you can spend as much time as you want leafing through drawers.

Viewers typically use several methods to manage what could be an overwhelming experience. One obvious system is to look through the files of the artists whose work you already know and scan their submissions.

It's been a while since I'd seen Susi Lulaki's work, and her modest, small-scale watercolors of dogs and their owners is one of the highlights, so far, of my Flatfile visits.

Gary Sutton is known primarily for his surrealist photo collages; the straightforward color photographs of outdoor scenes he's submitted here have a startling clarity. Susan White's dreamy photos of dust from birds' wings on her car windows are new and unexpected. Rodolfo Marron continues to mine the same poetic vision he displayed in his recent exhibit at the Nerman Museum in ways that enthrall.

The rigid, minimalist grids of Jim Woodfill remain alluring and poetic, as do Diane Henk's spectral white-on-white paper pieces. Debra Smith's fabric collages have developed some jazzy new curves and shapes. Rebecca Ofeish's photographs of suited figures suspended in the air and underwater are strange and wonderful; ditto for Kim Lindaberry's black and white pictures of naked "Travelers."

Both Carol Zastoupil and Jessica Kincaid have contributed very different artwork than what we're used to seeing from them, and it's exciting to see their artistic meanderings.

Another viewing strategy is to look at the curated art on the walls and then go to the file of an artist whose work intrigues you. So far the curators have taken two basic installation approaches: Put up anything and everything, which can result in a visual cacophony one finds either dissonant or provocative; or focus on one theme or medium, such as photography. I prefer the latter approach, but either way you're bound to see work by artists who are unfamiliar, and it's stimulating to encounter new aesthetic visions.

Recently, the three ethereal photos of detritus by Philip Heying on Wall D drew me to his file to see more; to my delight, Barrett Emke's images of dogs had the same effect, as did Hannah Carr's colorful abstract

photographs. These are the kinds of discoveries that keep one coming back, hoping for more such unexpected gems.

Some artists have clearly thought harder than others about what to include in their folders, and anyone tired of the “de-skilled” look could become grumpy after a dozen or more drawers. Other disappointments? KCAI curators and former contributors extend invitations to a broad range of artists via email, phone, mail, and Facebook. A number of well-known and older artists did not or could not participate, and only a few African-American artists chose to submit art. There is obviously a lot of work by young artists, and that is encouraging for the local art scene.

As for this viewer, I’ve got 175 more files to go through and a spate of digital art left to see.

*“2016 Kansas City Flatfile” continues at the Kansas City Art Institute’s H&R Block Artspace, 16 E. 43<sup>rd</sup> St., through Sept. 24. Summer hours are noon to 5 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday; open by appointment only from Aug. 3-16. For more information, 816.561.5563 or [www.kcai.edu/artspace](http://www.kcai.edu/artspace).*