

Massachusetts

ArtSpace@16/Malden

GESTURE: THE QUALITY OF QUANTITY

Lenin and Stalin were chatting about tanks one day, and Vlad said to Joe . . . Sounds like the set up to a good joke, doesn't it? Here is the punch line: "Quantity has a quality all its own." Quantity requires amount and unit: The meaning of the whole is in the aggregation of units, and the units' nature confers value on the whole.

Artist and curator Joanna L. Kao's *Gesture* embodies the chilling playfulness of the epigraph of her thoughtful, visually rich show. Papier maché fragments—in the shape of discarded garments or body parts—proliferate. Individually feather-light and easily dispersed, the yearning, grasping forms caged in wood and wire attain the urgency of critical mass. Evading evaluation or even enumeration, the elements garner meaning in the aggregate.

Thirteen regional artists engage the theme with a diversity equal to their number. Arousing feelings of suffocation, surfeit, or abundance, quantity returns us to childhood's greed and fear (consider the nightmarish nurturing of Alison Safford's *Tengo Sed*) but also to the trust that our needs will be met. Leika Akiyama captures this miasma in the relentless pop exuberance of four mixed media arrays of the highly colored, mass-produced detritus we all wade through daily. In contrast, Matthew Weber's *Cedar Shim Construction* marshals thousands of that essential yet modest building material into a classically pure, sensually and conceptually appealing work. Time, humanity's ultimate quantity, receives moving evocation in Aparna Agrawal's scattering of miniature twine-and-wire bedsteads, distillations of inevitably receding memory. C.J. Phu's exquisitely rendered, poignantly direct charcoal drawing, *Twelve*, simply recognizes the world's generous beauty.

Art, not tanks. One quality of quantity necessarily absent here is that mechanical exactitude satirized as long ago as modern times. Here, defining units are interchangeable yet unique, like the moments of the day. Transformed by selection and organization, they gain the dignity of recognition, participation, and meaning. One newly unfurled leaf can mean defiant hope; thousands mean spring.

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—Susan Boulanger