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## Three engaging shows highlight the summer at the Weatherspoon



CAROLYN DE BERRY PHOTO

Installation view: "Beverly Semmes: FRP", Weatherspoon Art Museum, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2015.

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*Tom Patterson/Special Correspondent*

Awaiting visitors to Greensboro's Weatherspoon Art Museum this summer are three engaging solo exhibitions that exemplify or update three important strains of art since the 1950s — op, pop and feminist art. Two of the artists live and work in New York, while the third is a North Carolinian and an alumna of UNC Greensboro.

The North Carolinian is McDonald Bane, who lived in Winston-Salem from 1976

to 1991 and received a masters of fine arts degree from UNCG. Bane is the op or post-op artist in this trio.

Op art employs geometric abstraction and tonal or color contrasts to create optical illusions and related visual effects. Strictly applied, the term doesn't fit all of Bane's 24 works in the show, but they're all hard-edged, geometric abstractions — and a number of them rely on op-art strategies.

This is art that requires a steady hand, a high degree of precision and lots of patience — often simple from a compositional standpoint, but always painstaking to make. Bane has been working in this manner since the early 1960s, demonstrating the seemingly limitless potential of line, shape and color to generate fresh, visually compelling art.

Her Weatherspoon show "2 Parts Art, 1 Part Science" is a mini-retrospective that spans 50 years, from 1964 to 2013. It includes five drawings and a group of nine prints from her 1974 "Entropy Series," but its most striking contents are its 10 paintings. Among their

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other distinctive features, they indicate her interest in the tension between symmetry and asymmetry — a thread that runs throughout her art.

They reflect her consistency and years of rigorous practice while also showing something of her work's subtle evolution. The more recent paintings use many of the same techniques as did the earlier ones, but they manage to look fresh and different, reflecting a different time and a different state of Bane's mind, no doubt.

The most conspicuous shift from the earlier to the newer work is a change in her approach: titling her paintings. The earlier ones are titled for their shapes or colors, or else they've been assigned letter-number coordinates. She gave more evocative, poetically associative titles to the two most recent ones here — "It's Inside," from 2003, and "Xanthus," made in 2013. It's a good sign that these paintings are among the strongest pieces here, indicating she's still at the top of her game.

Bane's show occupies one of the two ground-level galleries. The other gallery, next door, has been transformed by Burckhardt's clever, tour-de-force installation "Full Stop." It's a vividly imagined, pop-inflected, full-scale replica of an archetypal New York artist's studio, including a seedy-looking street-level building facade. And it's entirely fabricated from cutout, corrugated cardboard meticulously detailed with black paint and hot-glued together around a concealed wooden framework.

Burckhardt's terrific installation is cluttered with cardboard replicas of the stuff you might expect to find in an artist's studio, and it's obsessively authentic-looking down to the floor, made from slabs of cardboard painted to look like grainy hardwood stained with paint and imprinted with the occasional shoe print. Essentially it's a life-size, three-dimensional, comic-book image, and it's great fun to study in detail. Check out the titles and authors' names on the spines of the shelves full of books. The only blank space is the big cardboard canvas set up on the central easel.

The third and largest of these summer solo shows is Semmes' "FRP," on the top floor in the large McDowell Gallery. It brings together several different bodies of related works that Semmes has created since 1994.

The show's title stands for the "Feminist Responsibility Project," indicating an overarching aim most overtly reflected in the show's only body of two-dimensional work. In the latter untitled series, Semmes has extracted full-page color photographs of provocatively posed, naked women from porn magazines and performed an act of creative feminist censorship by expressionistically painting over the "naughty bits." The show includes 41 of these unframed painting interventions — they might be called — with individual titles such as "Swoon," "Rubber Boots" and "Mouth Pot." They were made between 2004 and 2014, indicating that the series remains open-ended.

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Semmes became widely known as an artist around the beginning of the 1990s as a result of her wall-mounted fabric sculptures elaborating on the basic form of a life-size woman's long, formal dress. Some of her early variations on this concept made up an installation at Winston-Salem's Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in the early 1990s — one of her first major solo shows outside New York.

One such piece, the earliest in "FRP," is also a highlight of the exhibition. "Buried Treasure" consists of an elegant black crushed-velvet dress, where one of the long sleeves extends without a discernible end, trailing downward from the rest of the wall-mounted garment to spill out onto the floor to fill an area occupying the entire back half of the gallery in a snaking, maze-like configuration. An accompanying color photograph documents a moment from an outdoor performance in which the artist or someone else — wearing the dress and a black mask completely covering her head — is stiffly posed alongside a large, unidentified body of water.

Otherwise, Semmes' Weatherspoon exhibition includes a roughly 15-minute video and two groups of craft-referenced sculpture. The video — in which she filmed herself kicking a few red-painted potatoes around is anything but compelling.

Not much more interesting is Semmes' installation of six clear-glass chandeliers — irregularly shaped bowls inverted and suspended from the ceiling on black electrical cords to partially enclose illuminated bulbs on the attached fixtures.

More striking and evocative are nine bright-red clay sculptures of columnar vessels, several of which are equipped with absurd numbers of built-in handles. In the context of Semmes' other work, they suggest comments on the manipulation of women's bodies in male-dominated societies. They also recall the work of George Ohr (1857-1918), aka "The Mad Potter of Biloxi."