

Matthew John Winters and Pat Snow share humor in shared exhibit at Grayduck Gallery

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BY LUKE QUINTON - SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Somehow in the early moments of their conversation, the talk drifted to dirty limericks. Although Pat Snow and Matthew Winters come from different generations and different parts of the country, they have more than a few things in common, limericks aside.

Both artists share a certain impishness and it comes across in their new exhibit at South Austin's Grayduck Gallery.

Snow has drawings made on 20-year-old cigarette wrappers. At the opening, Winters wore deck shoes he spray-painted gold — “Cause I'm flashy,” he said.

Comic books influenced them both.

Snow, as a kid growing up in Alabama, used to pop up at his friend's house unannounced, to go read comics — even if his friend wasn't around. Winters went a step further. “I wanted to do comics,” he said. But he had no patience “to draw the same character over and over.”

A college art professor noticed Winters' manic doodles and told him, “This is your medium.” Now, part of Winters' work takes a specific shape and fills it with a beautifully dense collection of hundreds of cartoonish images and symbols.

“I almost want to create a universe of characters,” he said.

The universe could be filled with a water hose, a steak, a radio tower or a cigarette stylishly tied into a knot. There's a cyclops, a ray gun, aliens and a collection of goofy sci-fi villains. There is a narrative there, however disjointed, if you read the image closely enough, he said.

Snow's narratives, on the other hand, are maybe a little more personal — he's painting his friends back in Birmingham, mostly women who take “selfies,” the obsessive self-portraits that dominate social media. He paints song lyrics or snippets of his conversations with each woman. “Stop Killing the Vibe,” one reads.

Not that all his subjects were thrilled with this document of their personality. “Really?” his friends asked, “Did you have to write our entire conversation?”

“These people in Austin, they don't even know you!” Snow told them.

Snow's portraits are a kind of reproduction of work he did in his primary medium, watercolor. “This is one of my first painting shows in 20 years,” he said.

Making paint look like watercolor is no easy feat and Snow said the result amounts to “inside paint jokes,” because oil and brush just don't do the same thing as water and a pigment. But playing with the boundaries of “high” and “low” art is part of the plan — and Snow does it with a sense of humor.

Take his series of scenes drawn on vintage paper, actually cigarette wrappers he's kept since using them for a show in 1992. They're tarnished like some old map and Snow's drawn on them with landscapes and street scenes from Alabama: A colonial house that hosts great Christmas parties, sketches of a neighborhood Winn Dixie. Snow made these after asking, “How could I have a landscape that would interest my mom and interest the art community?” he said.

Winters favors these found surfaces too. In his case, wood planks that he made into tiles of Islamic patterns. This is a separate stream of his work, apart from his dense groups of symbols — more clean lines and negative spaces, more tessellation and abstraction.

One wall-sized work that resembles pink riverbeds came from a coffee-table book; an image of snow-capped mountain tops. Another more austere drawing, uses hexagons to form two pillars. This idea came from an image Winters saw of two lone cathedral gates in South America.

But the sense of humor sticks out. Probably the most obvious sign of it came in their choice of promo-art for the show: They did portraits of each other.



A portrait of Matthew John Winters by Pat Snow, from the exhibit “Wintersnow Snowinters” at Grayduck Gallery through July 21.



A portrait of Pat Snow by Matthew John Winters. The two share an exhibit — “Wintersnow Snowinters” — at Grayduck Gallery.

Snowinters Wintersnow

When: Through July 21

Where: Grayduck Gallery, 608 W. Monroe St.

Cost: Free

Info: 512-826-5334, www.grayduckgallery.com