

# Austin American-Statesman

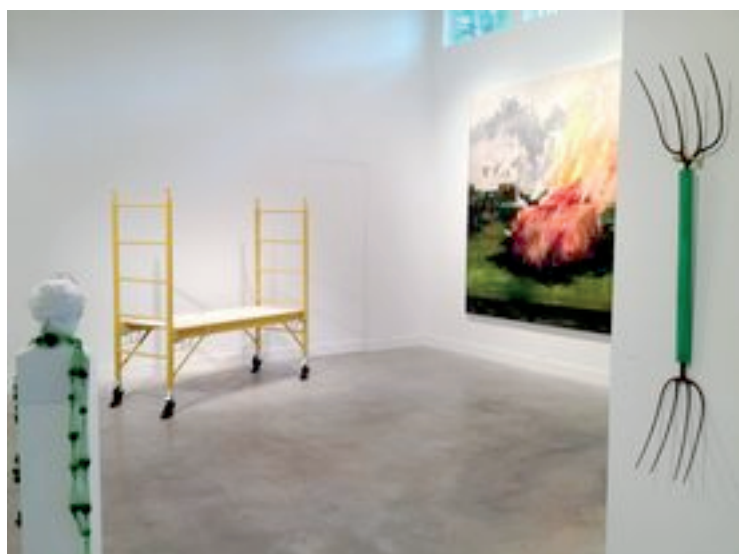
## Multimedia exhibit examines scapegoating

Posted: 11:00 p.m. Wednesday, June 3, 2015

By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin - American-Statesman Staff

Elizabeth McDonald dives deep.

In her solo exhibit “I Only Know Plenty,” at Grayduck Gallery through June 21, the Austin-based artist unfurls a visually alluring inquiry into a rather ugly social behavior: scapegoating.



Installation view of Elizabeth McDonald's solo exhibit “I Only Know Plenty” at Grayduck Gallery.

McDonald marshals much to do so: delicate ink drawings; luscious, large and expressive paintings that combine oil and watercolor paint; sculpture wrested out of ready-made material (pitchforks, scaffolding); historical newsreel footage culled from YouTube and screened on a iPhone; a sculptural bust made of plastic that's cast via 3-D printer.

In lesser hands, such a diverse range of art media might turn out conceptually and literally messy. But there's a deftness to what McDonald creates and a measured quality to the manner in which she arranges her exhibition.

To illuminate the culture of blaming and shaming, McDonald trains her lens almost specifically on the post-liberation head-shaving of French women accused of collaborating with Nazi occupying forces.



“All That Ever Was” by Elizabeth McDonald

By way of background, McDonald offers a montage of historic footage of the public humiliations, though visitors view it on the small screen of an iPhone, a reminder that while technology affords us access to historical information like never before, the efficiency of modern gadgets can reduce that information to hand-held blurs.

Images from that historic footage ricochet in McDonald's paintings and drawings. And yet the most starkly dramatic painting is of Japanese pop star Minami Minegishi, who shaved her own head as an act of contrition after fan backlash erupted simply when it was discovered she had a boyfriend.

Other acts of contrition are depicted in paintings and drawing — pyres of books burn, human figures supplicate en masse, freshly cleaned white sheets hang on laundry lines for all the neighbors to see.

A pitchfork with two pronged ends hangs on the gallery wall — the proverbial double-edged sword of a revenge-seeking mob?

For as potent as her fundamental subject matter is, McDonald isn't scared of a little humor.

There's much to unpack in “I Only Know Plenty,” but part of the enchantment is combing over the multifarious objects on display to piece it all together in an almost archaeological fashion.

Likewise it was with McDonald's exhibit late last year at Pump Project Gallery, “Contamination/Pollination,” a show that recently netted the Austin Critics' Table Award for Outstanding Solo Exhibition.

In that, she offered the story of Soviet naval officer Vasili Arkhipov — who single-handedly prevented the launch of nuclear torpedoes during the Cuban missile crisis and effectively prevented the eruption of an all-out nuclear war — and mashed it up with human hive behavior, contagious viral epidemics and bee colony collapse, all in a visually beguiling multimedia swirl.

With “I Only Know Plenty” McDonald once again successfully shoehorns big concepts into an average-size gallery exhibit — and does so with élan.

“I Only Know Plenty: Elizabeth McDonald”

When: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday through June 21

Where: Grayduck Gallery, 2213 E. Cesar Chavez St.

Cost: Free

Info: 512-826-5334, [www.grayduckgallery.com](http://www.grayduckgallery.com)