

Strange bedfellows

Works by Richard Segalman, Robert Ohnigian & Martha Walker now on view at Woodstock Framing Gallery

by Paul Smart

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There's an aesthetic balance to the new exhibition of collage, sculpture, painted and charcoal works at the Woodstock Framing Gallery (WFG) – one of the region's best galleries – that is almost impossible to imagine, especially if one has seen the works of Richard Segalman, Robert Ohnigian and Martha Walker beforehand. Segalman seems Old School on first acquaintance; he is best-known for sun-dappled

Impressionistic works that as often as not depict women in windblown summer dresses at the beach, reminiscent of Winslow Homer's play with light and texture, or French painting of the early 20th century. It's only after one sees a lot of the master's work, or speaks with him about what drives him in his artist's ramblings among Woodstock, his native Brooklyn and South Florida, however, that one gets the formalist aspects of what makes his paintings so alluring.

Ohnigian – who has owned Clouds, a high-end specialty art crafts store in Woodstock (in which he once ran one of the region's premier galleries), for decades – creates what look like small landscapes and abstract pieces. They appear highly painterly, until one realizes that his materials include bits of postage stamps, aged brown paper, parts of 19th-century book illustrations and minuscule numbers, all played for texture and tone. Increasingly showing in New York and Los Angeles galleries, he has been called a modern inheritor of the great Surreal assemblage artist Joseph Cornell's subtle palette.

Walker, who splits time between Brooklyn and Woodstock, where she runs a privately funded mini-artists' colony at her home each summer, works in puddle steel, which she then paints shiny-black. Her pieces feel amorphous, like living creatures dragged up from the bottom of the ocean or landed from earlier eons on earth. They start out looking heavy (which they are), but become lighter the longer that one ponders them. And from the strength of Walker's originality and execution through to her adamant way with promotion, it seems that she's now having her own moment of fame, with a growing number of gallery shows up and down the East Coast drawing her attention.

So how does all this fit together, from the lightness of Segalman's oeuvre to Ohnigian's deep subtleties to Walker's heavily grounded sculptures? "I wondered that myself when I got the stuff in... It took several people to move a single one of Martha's pieces alone," said WFG's Alice Hoffman, who has become known amongst discriminating collectors and artists for her keen eye and way of picking the best work in the area – often largely unseen before she graces it with a gallery show.

But then Hoffman started playing works off each other in each of the rooms and areas that make up her framing business' gallery space. A room of Segalman's now seems to be drawn into a new area of seriousness, drawing attention to its painterly qualities, by Walker's sculptures. Similarly, the smallest Ohnigians lend added subtlety to the largest steel shapes, gnarled yet graceful. And spotted throughout the show are a few early charcoal drawings and uncharacteristic abstracted works that take a moment to be identified as Segalman's – and then add to his stature, as well as the lift and various points of catharsis that define this entire exhibition. It's got to be seen to be felt, experienced and inevitably learned from.

And what lessons lie within what Hoffman has brought together? That there's still new life in both the older styles of art, as well as the long-thriving Woodstock art scene; that what one at first finds in a piece isn't always its greatest strength; and that, in the end, complexity, no matter how quietly or even simply imparted, still trumps all in art – and probably in life, too.

Woodstock Framing Gallery, open most times excepting Sundays during regular business hours, is located at 31 Mill Hill Road in Woodstock. For further information call (845) 679-6023 [begin_of_the_skype_highlighting](#) (845) 679-6023 [end_of_the_skype_highlighting](#); the Gallery does not maintain a website.