

# Review: Dazzling drawings on display at Shattuck

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Courtesy of the artist "Greenland #51," a soft pastel on paper by Zaria Forman, is part of the current exhibition at Dedee Shattuck Gallery in Westport.

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By **Don Wilkinson**

Contributing writer

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Hugette May has a reputation for creating beautiful, complex renderings of frayed rope and twisted knots — and has infused the mundane subject matter with a significance marshaled by scale, intricacy and a stylized sense of hyper-realism. But those visiting the current three-artist exhibition at the Dedee Shattuck Gallery hoping to see those rope drawings "I'm afraid not.

May's new series revolves around segments of wasp's nests and she engages the subject with the same intensity and detail.

Displayed under glass vessels are the nest segments, and she kindly supplies the viewer with a magnifying glass that would do Sherlock Holmes proud to closely examine her source material.

"Mother Ship" is an archival digital print from a charcoal-and-pastel drawing. Astonishingly detailed, it is a primarily gray work exploring the honeycomb. A single leaf of olive and pale greens, tinged with a rusty shade of red, adds a delicate caress of unexpected hue.

Similarly, "Red Stems" employs fine lines of crimson to great effect, as they embrace the nest.

Also displayed by May are a series of manipulated digital photographs, collectively "Satellite I — X".

Fragments of the wasp nests hover mysteriously in the night sky, or at dusk, dawn or the afternoon. The varied shapes resemble science-fiction worlds and alien orbs. One takes on the appearance of a death mask; strangely, another resemble the iconic Apple computer logo.

Sandra Allen exhibits only one drawing, but it is a massive drawing. Measuring nearly 11 by 9 feet, "Ballast" is a tightly rendered pencil work, done on 15 connecting cotton rag paper panels. The subject is a segment of a tree. The enormous scale turns the bark fissures into valleys, bumps become hills, and the natural corrugations and ridges of the tree surface take on the appearance of a gigantic and highly detailed topographic map. Unsurprisingly, "Ballast" takes up an entire wall of the gallery and when one gets close enough to it, one feels a sense of odd otherworldliness, as one becomes an ant on the maple.

Zaria Forman works in soft pastels from photographs taken in Greenland, and she is currently an artist-in-residence at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, in conjunction with that institution's "Arctic Visions" exhibition. Her work, done in soft pastel, can be enthralling and is done in a style that borders on photorealism. "Greenland #56" is a prime example. From more than two feet away, it appears to be a highly focused photograph. It is a richly black, powerful vision of the sea. It is wonderfully articulated. Only when one gets in very close to the work, does it become apparent that it is not a photograph. The soft smudge of pastel and the delicacy of the artist's hand are revealed.

"Greenland #58" shimmers with watery light reflections, and the blue is lush. But not all are as successful. Although Forman's drawing skill borders on the shamanistic, the overly wrought ice floes, snowcaps and sun-dappled seas are infused with an over-romanticism that borders on kitsch. Somewhere in the back of my head, Bob Ross's voice lingers, talking about "mighty white."

The exhibition continues at the Dedee Shattuck Gallery, 1 Partners Lane, Westport until May 28.

Don Wilkinson is a painter and art critic who lives in Fairhaven. Contact him at [Don.Wilkinson@gmail.com](mailto:Don.Wilkinson@gmail.com)

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