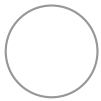
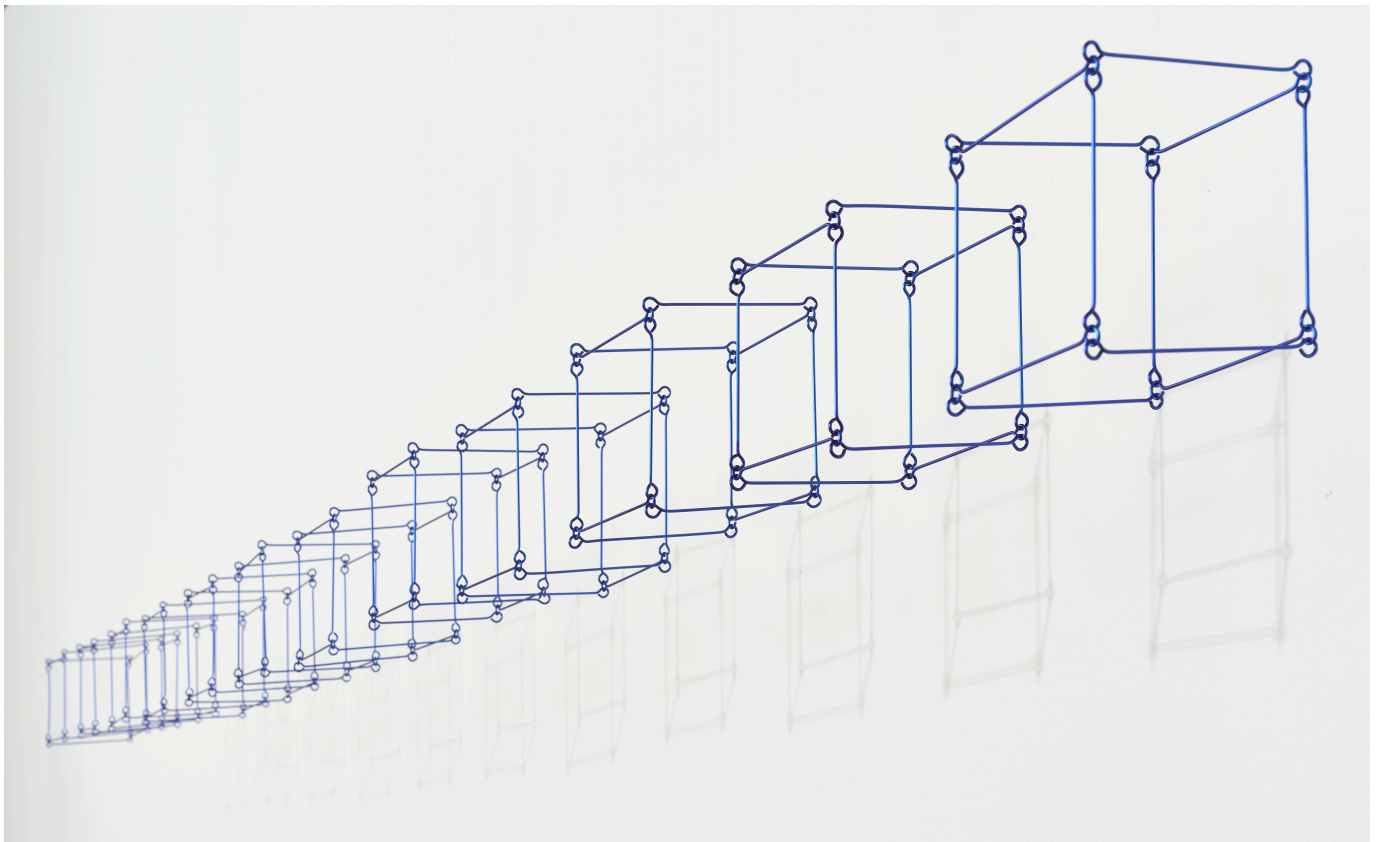


Three art exhibits in Houston try to make sense of a difficult year

The "Maggi and Crespin" show at Sicardi | Ayers Bacino is one of a handful that are soon to be closing in the next two weeks. And they're among three that I'd highly recommend viewing before their...



Andrew Dansby | May 13, 2021 Updated: May 17, 2021, 8:42 am



Marco Maggi called his new collection of works “No visual distancing please...,” which I took to be less a title and more an instruction. His works – playfully listed as “paper on paper on paper” – possess a depth of field that prompted me to nearly touch my nose to the glass. Even then, I wanted to be inside these delicate marvels, so off came my glasses for a closer look.

“No visual distancing (Blue)” resembles a nighttime sky far removed from the city or a look at the lights of suburbs from space. Maggi’s layering of paper – a mesmerizing mix of tiny squares and dashes of white on blue – is a meticulous sort of minimalist architecture. It creates a trance-like effect, which is the point. Maggi, a native of Uruguay, has said all his work has come from a sort of self-imposed quarantine in his studio. With these new works he aspires to create a different sense of time, to strike a relationship with a viewer that slows down the pace of one’s day. I feel safe saying he accomplished this mission resoundingly.

Maggi’s “No visual distancing” is part of a dual exhibition at Sicardi | Ayers Bacino, along with Elias Crespín’s “And Yet It Moves!” Much as Maggi’s works urge viewers to lean in, Crespín’s works reward those who take the time to step back. A star of a Latin American Kinetic Art movement, Venezuelan Crespín works with simple geometric shapes in painted aluminum and sets them into motion. Their movements are gradual and graceful, often finding a soothing path before descending into chaos. Words and photos fail to properly convey their hypnotic spell.

Maggi and Crespín

When: Viewing by appointment through June 18

Where: Sicardi | Ayers Bacino, 1506 Alabama

Details: free; 713-529-1313, sicardi.com

Fresh and Contemporary: Moving Forward

When: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through May 29

Where: Houston Museum of African American Culture, 4807 Caroline

Details: free; 713-526-1015, hmaac.org

SHIFT

When: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Fri., by appointment Saturdays and Sundays, through June 4

Where: Dimmitt Contemporary Art, 3637 Alabama, Suite 160

Details: free; dimmittcontemporaryart.com

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Moving forward

Where Maggi’s pieces pulled in the eye with variations on blue and white, black and white and white and white, Khalif Thompson’s “Kareem and the Boys” does so with a tapestry of materials spread across a big, broad 5-foot-by-5-foot canvas. Thompson’s portrait of a father and two sons makes use of oil, suede, velvet, denim, handmade paper, papyrus, origami paper, pastel, graphite and in its top corner a piece of comic book. Bright primary and secondary colors crackle against the avocado background. And the three subjects are arranged in a naturalistic way, as though Thompson, a New Yorker, caught them with a photograph: stylish Kareem and his older son leaning together and the younger child looking astray. Thompson’s geometric patterns create a frame within the frame.

“Kareem and the Boys” is part of “Fresh and Contemporary: Moving Forward,” which opened in February at the Houston Museum of African American Culture. The exhibition’s title serves a dual meaning: In addition to showcasing contemporary artists, curator John Guess also identified a desire to channel the tumult of the past year into “a sort of fresh start.” Social tumult and setbacks – “inclusion, exclusion and confusion,” Guess says – are on display in the works, but also tempered with a feeling of hope. Or as he refers to it, “a fresh start.”

Many of the chosen works – including “Kareem and the Boys” – bear a strong narrative sensibility, their frozen forms appearing to be on the cusp of motion. Some of the narratives are informed by outrage, some by frustrations, others by sadness. “Ode to Rockwell’s ‘Freedom From Want’” manages to be pointed and outrageously funny. The artist collaborative E2 – Elizabeth Kleinveld and Epaul Julien – have reimagined Rockwell’s turkey dinner with all manner of new faces representing a more diverse dinner, with an inflatable fowl on a platter underscoring a perceived artificiality of the original.

Positive shift

Dimmitt Contemporary Art is also just a few weeks from closing “SHIFT,” an exhibition with a title that, like “Fresh and Contemporary,” speaks to looking for a new start after a horrible year. For “SHIFT” Dimmitt assembled works by 15 women. The stylistic breadth on display is great, but there emerges among the pieces a bright cohesion. A wispy melancholy intermingles with nostalgia in Melissa Chandon’s “Barn With Turquoise and Green.” Like her paintings of swimming pools (but never swimmers), the canvas finds a notable mid-20th century mood that counterbalances that era’s optimism with a sense of solitude.



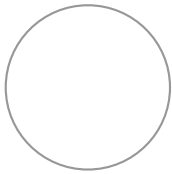
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emanating outward. Its pull is formidable. I also loved the way Kate Roebuck used heavyweight watercolor paper to soak the ink used on the serene “Nectarine,” lending it

the appearance of a textile print viewed through water. On the subject of soaking, Sara Genn's "Everything Will Be OK (Memoir)" looks like an unearthed and oversized glyph created by her precisely pouring acrylic on Belgian linen.

As with Fresh and Contemporary and Maggi and Crespin, these pieces were largely created during a strange, trying and tumultuous year. And the three exhibitions offer a remarkable series of perspectives on time and place, as the featured artists tried to make some sense of that period of time.

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Andrew Dansby covers culture and entertainment, both local and national, for the **Houston Chronicle**. He came to the Chronicle in 2004 from Rolling Stone, where he spent five years writing about music. He'd previously spent five years in book publishing, working with George R.R. Martin's editor on the first two books in the series that would become TV's "Game of Thrones. He misspent a year in the film industry, involved in three "major" motion pictures you've never seen. He's written for Rolling Stone, American Songwriter, Texas Music, Playboy and other publications.

Andrew dislikes monkeys, dolphins and the outdoors.