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BUILDING BLOCKS OF LAND AND LANGUAGE

Sarah Hulsey and Rhonda Smith Chart New Territory at the Chandler Gallery

CAMBRIDGE, MA (January 15, 2016) – Painter Rhonda Smith and Printmaker Sarah Hulsey are turning cartography on its head. Their upcoming show at the Chandler Gallery, “Schemata,” showcases the artists’ different approaches to mapping as metaphor. Hulsey combines theoretical linguistics with historical diagrams to create pictorial representations of words and ideas, while Smith’s abstract paintings evoke geological forces in motion.

Hulsey says that printmaking, with its emphasis on “repetition, seriality, and discrete marks built up into larger forms,” allows her to “visualize the complex systems behind language.” Hulsey’s “Hydrogen” looks like a diagram of a molecule: black lines connect three distinct groups of symbols enclosed in circles. But the symbols in each unit are linguistic, rather than chemical. Each unit is a syllable in the word “hy-dro-gen,” and each unit contains the phonemes that comprise that syllable. Just as atoms are the building blocks of matter, Hulsey constructs names of chemical elements from their phonemes, the building blocks of speech. The viewer also participates in creating the meaning of the words in the installation by decoding the phonemes and assembling the syllables.

In contrast to Hulsey’s symbol-based cerebral puzzles, Smith’s works are explosions of color and texture. As Smith investigates the collision of land and water, her paintings rise from the walls, nearly crossing the border into hanging sculpture. “That Awful Mess” is a swirl of reds and green-grays coalescing in a 3D centerpiece of smooth lumps, twisted strings, and gritty silt. It could be a close-up view of the tide encroaching on a bed of seaweed or an aerial view of a coastal city. Smith is fascinated by “the human impulse to explore what is around the next bend...[and] to allow the unknown to impress itself upon us.” The artwork in “Schemata” offers plenty to explore.

“Schemata: Works by Sarah Hulsey and Rhonda Smith” is on display at the Chandler Gallery from February 15-March 11. The opening reception will be held on February 18 from 6-8pm. Maud Morgan Arts is a program under the umbrella of the Agassiz Baldwin Community, a private non-profit organization with a forty-year history of quality programs and services in the Cambridge community. Maud Morgan Arts comprises a full arts program of classes and workshops for all ages, the Chandler Gallery, and a collection of original art by noted artist and community resident Maud Morgan (1903-1999). The agency works to reflect the diversity and talents of the community, bringing people together to make art, share art, and support visual arts education.

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