

REVIEW: ONE PIECE DOWN AT DAM, TWO GALLERIES CHANGING THINGS UP

MICHAEL PAGLIA | DECEMBER 6, 2017 | 5:30AM



"Lao Tzu," by Mark di Suvero, in front of the Ponti tower.

Courtesy of the Denver Art Museum

While I am 100 percent behind giving the [Denver Art Museum's Ponti tower a facelift](#), now that it's been shuttered, I'm mourning this significant loss — temporary though it is — to the city's cultural life. It was the right move, especially considering the awful alternatives of either allowing the building to get more run down or demolishing it altogether. Still, having this original portion of the museum closed until the work is completed in 2021 — the building's fiftieth anniversary — makes this worthy project as bitter as it is sweet.

The most emphatic evidence of the coming changes at the DAM was the removal last week of the monumental [sculpture "Lao Tzu," by Mark di Suvero](#), which was consigned to storage after being lifted in pieces from the spot on Acoma Plaza that it had occupied since 1996. (I was there when it was originally installed and got to meet di Suvero, who oversaw the installation from a bucket lift.) "Lao Tzu" is a tangle of steel beams painted

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hazard orange, and I consider it the most significant piece of public sculpture in Denver. It's obviously well regarded by the public at large, too, since it was used to symbolize the museum in a recent TV ad campaign promoting the city's GO bonds. When construction is completed, the piece will be reinstalled on the plaza, though it might move a foot or two toward the Denver Public Library. (The DAM's Hamilton Building, of course, will remain open through the project, with extended hours.)

I checked out "Lao Tzu" one last time a couple of days before it was dismantled, when I was in the neighborhood to catch the current offerings at [Goodwin Fine Art](#). The contemplative mood in the main space at Goodwin, where *Martha Russo: circumvolo* is on view, is a welcome relief from the hurly-burly of the endless construction going on in the Golden Triangle. The elegant show is filled with the Boulder-area artist's latest exercises in creating sculptural installations out of aggregations of small elements done in clay, porcelain, paper and other materials in a range of shapes and colors. Although these works are signature Russo, they struck me as having subtly changed stylistically — and, in some cases, actually, as a few are reformulated earlier works.



Martha Russo, *klynge*, mixed materials

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Russo's classic pieces evoke undersea life such as corals and other inhabitants of the ocean floor, not only in the way that the artist has clustered the various parts, but also because the individual components are often based on the shape of shells or even tentacles. In "klynge," for instance, Russo has put a repeating clamshell motif together with other naturalistic shapes so that they rise off the wall, with a few strays trailing off on one side. The color scheme of subtle reds, greens and browns lends the piece an added richness.

Despite the literal references to shellfish, the overall character of "klynge" and other Russo sculptures is abstract. More surprising, this abstract quality is present even when Russo uses found materials that are recognizable as such, as in "lightness of being." For that piece, she dipped items such as carrot tops and socks in porcelain slip, then scattered them across the back corner, where they are suspended slightly out from the walls by nearly invisible filaments. Taken together, the sculptures in *circumvolo* — Latin for "hover" — create their own completely enveloping atmosphere.

The Russo show transitions flawlessly into *Kimberlee Sullivan: Limnology*, which begins across from "lightness of being" and proceeds into the back space. The show's title refers to inland waterways, continuing the watery theme established by Russo. For her part, Sullivan captures fleeting moments seen on the surface of water in highly abstracted paintings and works on paper. Most comprise color fields dominated by the reflected blues and greens of the sky, but a few are taken over by the blazing red-orange of the sunrise or sunset.

An enormous diptych titled "Sphere Cycle, Night Equals Day" sets the mood. The left panel is covered in blacks and blues, with scribbled forms in chalk-like strokes floating at the top. The right is dazzling in shades of white and off-white, with that chalky effect completely covering the surface. Also notable is a group of six works on paper, each setting scribble marks against an all-over field of color. The piece that most obviously suggests water is "Stream Level 1," two square panels lined up horizontally with arching lines suggesting the wavelets on the surface of a lake. To seal the illusion, Sullivan has covered her marks in shiny resin so that the piece looks like it's wet.

Martha Russo: *circumvolo* and Kimberlee Sullivan: *Limnology*, through December 30, Goodwin Fine Art, 1255 Delaware Street, 303-573-1255, goodwinfineart.com.

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