

## REVIEW

# Jarring Juxtapositions

Charlie Aldrich's imagery puts forth a powerful message

BY WESLEY PULKKA  
FOR THE JOURNAL

Painter Charlie Aldrich's lushly colorful and painstakingly rendered still-life, wildlife, abstract and figurative acrylics are featured in "Top Drawer," a solo show at Palette Contemporary Art and Craft through July 22.

Also showing among an astounding array of impressive objects are two beautiful lithographs by Sonia Delaunay (1895-1979). Her husband, Robert, whom she met in Paris in 1910, was the father of orphism, a form of synthetic cubism based upon color orchestration.

Though Robert's art lost momentum after World War I, Sonia became a highly lauded textile, clothing and stage set designer, who even created abstract paint themes for automobiles and airplanes during the Roaring Twenties. The prints in this show were executed in the 1960s and hark back to her early days with Robert.

Aldrich is inspired by the look and often confusing narrative of aging billboards and decaying commercial signage along the old two-lane highways crisscrossing the Southwest. He revels in the peeling layers of posters, painted letters and the general vicissitudes of weathering that create richly evocative images with jarring juxtapositions of message.

Aldrich boils down those inspirational found messages from billboard scale to mostly small still-life paintings overlaid with a heavy, clear high-gloss varnish, making his intricate compositions look like elaborately decorated pieces of ceramic tile.

Although Aldrich borrows the look of aging signage, his still-life objects are personal found objects or things passed through generations of his own family. His work really proves the concept that the more personal one gets

## IF YOU GO

**WHAT:** "Top Drawer" new acrylic still life, wild life and figurative paintings by Charlie Aldrich

**WHEN:** Through July 22. Hours are: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays. Call 855-7777.

**WHERE:** Palette Contemporary Art and Craft, 7400 Montgomery NE, Mossman Shopping Center

**HOW MUCH:** Free

in self-expression, the more universal the message becomes.

While viewing Aldrich's "Red Dot Egg," I was reminded of an encounter with a fellow student at MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art) more than 50 years ago. He was painting a still life consisting of rows of eggs and white porcelain cups. When I asked him why he was using only black, white and gray on such a spare composition, he said he was inspired by Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964).

After looking up Morandi, who was a master Italian modernist, I was impressed with both artists' use of architectonic forms as compositional elements.

Though Aldrich eschews pure tonality and whose work can be described as riotously colorful, those pesky architectonics a la Morandi are also evident in his still-life structures.

Aldrich uses open cigar boxes and other geometric hints to create Joseph Cornell-style tabletop tableaux. "Red Dot Egg," "Flight Prep" and "Camel Rose" all incorporate cigar boxes to act as doorways and spatial containers.

My favorite aspect of "Red Dot Rose" is the spatial ambiguity of the box apparently floating in limitless space patterned with rectangles.

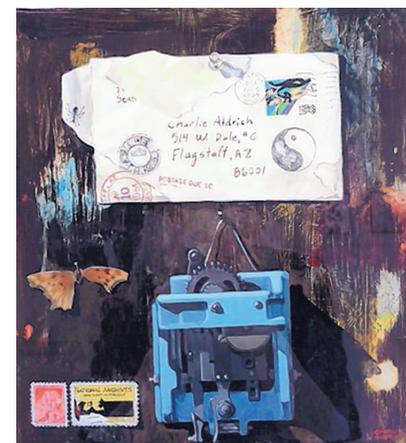
I'm reminded of the black hole experience in the movie "Interstellar" wherein the



"Red Dot Egg" by Charlie Aldrich is one of several still-life paintings incorporating a cigar box as a spatial doorway and container in his "Top Drawer" solo exhibition at Palette Contemporary Art and Craft.



"Flight Prep" by Charlie Aldrich utilizes a cigar box, a tin toy bird, a thread spool and other selected objects to tell an imaginary story about life in a childlike dream world.



"Luddites Dream" blends elements from 19th century European trompe-l'oeil still-life paintings and contemporary steam-punk mock aversion to technology to create an eye-popping narrative composition.

protagonist is suspended among an infinite array of bookshelves and periods of time while trying to communicate with his earthbound daughter.

Aldrich is a very talented draftsman who can easily make trompe-l'oeil deceive a reality. His objects — including both real and toy birds, eggs or faces — seem

true to life. His sense of color is stunning, and his variable brushwork lends character to all of his pictorials.

Aldrich has stories to tell and is articulate enough to tell them well. This is a truly interesting show with a wide range of imagery that excites the mind and titillates the eye.