

In the galleries: Out of nothingness — art

By Mark Jenkins August 14, 2015

Carol Brown Goldberg

The Phillips Collection has played a crucial role in the development of local artists, but as the museum expanded, it came to emphasize better-known names. The Phillips's "One-on-One" series invites contemporary Washington artists into the institution, but not on their own; it pairs them with a Phillips-owned work of their choice. Carol Brown Goldberg selected Henri Matisse's 1948 "Interior With Egyptian Curtain," a still life that features lemons, a palm tree outside a window and that vibrantly patterned curtain.

To anyone who saw Goldberg's outstanding 2013 show at Addison/Ripley Fine Art, Matisse might seem an odd choice. The work in that exhibition was abstract and it shrewdly balanced rigidity and freedom, pattern and gesture. But Goldberg is a versatile artist who works in a variety of media. Her response to Matisse consists of two black-and-white ink drawings and one painting, not one of which is as representational as "Interior With Egyptian Curtain," yet all depict a extravagant Eden.

The painting, "Maggie on My Mind," is a jumble of blossoms, fronds and tendrils, tightly grouped and in profusion. As in Matisse's canvas, the forms are outlined, and those strong lines are perhaps as important as the hues they contain. Forgoing realist painting's modeling and gradations of color, both Goldberg and her famed precursor adopt a flatter look and a child-like vigor. And both pictures have areas of robust black, although they're used in different ways.

Yet "Maggie on My Mind" is wilder and more immersive. Matisse not only tidily arranged objects within a frame, but also provided a subsidiary rectangle within that frame: the window. Goldberg looks past boundaries, and right angles in general, to beckon the viewer into the fecund scene. "Interior With Egyptian Curtain" portrays nature from a distance, with equal emphasis on inside and out. In Goldberg's vision, there is only in. Welcome to the jungle.

One-on-One: Carol Brown Goldberg/Henri Matisse On view through Sept. 6 at the Phillips Collection, 1600 21st St. NW. 202-387-2151. www.phillipscollection.org.

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