

Artists Damen, Kornet, Phillips Present the Human Condition by
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Jessica Damen:

Damen is represented in the exhibition by a series of tall, narrow “sliver” paintings. Around 1’ wide and approaching 7’ tall, several of the pieces function like core samples, revealing the intermingling of different layers of matter and realms of experience. Each work is a response to a poem or a poet’s remembrance which viewers can read and hear at Damen’s Visions Voices Verses website linked at greenbeltmd.gov/arts. The exhibition title derives from one such source text: Meadow Turf by Janet Lewis. This poem inspired Damen’s painting Lacing Life and Death, depicting a boy in a flowery meadow, “his legs laced into its underground growth” nourished by the remains of seasons past. Damen’s Leaping into Eel’s Death Colors, a meditation on the death of a dear friend and collaborator, similarly juxtaposes a vibrant surface world with a watery underworld, full of agency and adventure in its own right. The painting No Memorials for This Lot, created in 2018, bears an uncanny resonance in our present moment; sunflowers – the national flower of Ukraine – are equated with fallen soldiers. As penned by Tim Joyce in the source poem for this piece, “how recently they were golden-faced and young.”

Damen’s works are lavishly painted, from the cheek of a human figure to the flesh of a strawberry dropped on the kitchen floor. Her canvases are full of light, life and color, not-

withstanding their darker allusions. Damen's work seems to be fueled by the sort of cognitive and emotional dissonance that has become so pervasive in recent times, as we witness blossoms unfolding cheerfully in the midst of a pandemic, birds singing in a world at war. In the artist's words, the paintings "strive to mend universal wounds through beauty," healing both by suturing and by soothing.

Judith Kornet