

# Two artists, friends, whose work has a kinship

The days of believing it necessary to make a clear distinction between the works of two individual artists in a two-person show may finally be over. They certainly are if the show's curator and the two artists are on the same page, and the artists in question want to present their works together without boundaries. It's sort of like being "an artist team" without the commitment.

"Sweet Meat," an exhibition at the Print Center that pairs the like-minded (and occasionally black-and-white) photographs of two Rhode Island School of Design graduates and friends, Jesse Burke and Nils Ericson, is a perfect example of the separate-but-collaborative spirit. Unless you obsessively consult the labels identifying individual contributions to the various walls pairing clusters of Burke's and Ericson's photographs, it's difficult to tell their work apart. (I recommend carrying the checklist around with you.) Not only do both move among landscape, portraiture, and still life, they appear in each other's photographs.

Shades of difference do eventually make themselves known.

In Burke's photographs, isolated male and female figures are often surrounded by darkness, looking vulnerable or fragile. Men frequently are shown bare-chested, wearing hoods or hats. A self-portrait



A 1961 example of William Earle Williams' "Party Pictures," from society galas and drag balls.

Jesse Burke's self-portrait, "Father." He and Nils Ericson have a joint show at the Print Center.



paintings and Coen brothers films come to mind.

The overlaps in Burke's and Ericson's sensibilities and styles are exaggerated by their photographs' close proximity in this exhibition, and that's clearly the point: They go so well together.

I was disappointed not to see more of William Earle Williams' "Party Pictures" in his show in the Print Center's ground-floor gallery. I could easily imagine an installation here in the style of those old restaurant interiors that are check-a-block with shots of celebrities — but I enjoyed the photographs I did see.

Williams, who's now known for his photographs of American landscapes pertaining to African American history, the Civil War, and the Underground Railroad, and is the

recipient of both Pew and Guggenheim fellowships, took these black-and-white pictures of people at society galas and drag balls in Philadelphia between 1977 and 1984, when the party scene here was at its apogee (imagine the drag queen Harlow and the media magnate Walter Annenberg out on the town on the same night).

Williams' eye for the telling detail — some images are even a little cruel, especially those featuring middle-aged arms in the days before aerobics and sunscreen — is so acute, you can imagine why he tired of frivolity so early in his career, and why these pictures have the razor-sharp edge they do.

The Print Center, 1614 Latimer St., 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Tuesdays through Saturdays.  
www.printcenter.org or  
215-735-6090. Through May 21.

## Good works

The latest show at the Mount Airy Contemporary Artists Space pairs the assemblages of Alexis Granwell with the paintings of Rick Lewis and proves (again) that contemporary art can pass muster anywhere, even in an 18th-century carriage house in bosky Mount Airy.

Granwell's delicate interminglings of colorful cast-off bits of cardboard, leather, wood, wire, paint, and thread look like abstract paintings set loose from canvases. They're the descendants of works by artists like Judy Pfaff and Richard Tuttle, but with a whimsical architecture all their own.



Alexis Granwell's assemblage "Wax and Wane I" (2010) at Mount Airy Contemporary Artists Space.

All kinds of ingredients coalesce in Lewis' small, rough-hewn abstract paintings — besides oil paint and dry pigments, you can find asphalt, marble dust, newsprint, and graphite in the mix. I see walls with remnants of posters and graffiti on them as a possible influence, but they can also resemble aerial views of landscapes.

Hurry: Only one Saturday left.

Mount Airy Contemporary Artists Space, 25 W. Mount Airy Ave., 1 to 4 p.m. Saturdays.  
267-270-2787 or www.mountairycontemporary.com. Through Saturday.