



ARTS+ENTERTAINMENT ~ ARTS

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## Six easy pieces: Casey Roberts at Herron

by Julianna Thibodeaux

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### Casey Roberts Herron School of Art and Design Through March 2

In a tidy exhibition of just six big pieces, on view at Herron School of Art and Design's modest-sized Basile Gallery, local artist (and former Herron student) Casey Roberts offers a bold sampling of his ever-evolving approach involving an unconventional technique utilizing cyanotype print chemicals.

Although Roberts' images are not devoid of recognizable imagery, there's a sparseness that gives a sense of layered depth not easily achieved in busier visual compositions. Adding to their mystery, on the Sunday I visited the gallery, tucked away down a hallway in the center of the Herron complex and no larger than a small classroom, there was nary a soul around; and the pieces were not titled.

On the other hand, my daughter and I had the opportunity to see the work on its own merits — and granted, I had some prior knowledge. I assume Roberts employs the same technique — which is, as he described to me over a year ago, "building a history" on paper with the cyanotype process, exposing the paper to light and chemical and water at various stages, blocking out certain portions to reveal imagery, or applying chemicals that will react to light and reveal imagery. The additive-subtractive process is no doubt complicated, but the results are delightfully not so. Rather, these meta-landscapes offer quiet spaces that seem to recede into the suggested depths of a forest, with just a few spare, leafless trees in the foreground and a smattering of feathery fir trees in the background. In between them, open, unadorned space offers much to the imagination. These landscapes beckon us, come on in.

The fact that such bad chemicals can create such good art is a bit of an enigma, but certainly it's not a new concept. Roberts assured me he is careful with his tools — and he uses them to spare and lovely effect.

In these larger landscapes, eyes are floating among the trees; in one case, a cascade of tears falls uniformly to the ground. The teardrops are perfect round dots, affixed to the paper rather than painted on, as if they emerged from a hole punch. On the ground, clean scoops of earth suggest another enigma: Are these excavations of some kind? And what to make of the snowflakes, these far more random in their fluttering fall? Other recurring imagery such as a cascade of gems suggests "good qualities in people," Roberts once told me.

Finally, in one of Roberts' most arresting pieces, three tombstone shapes populate the foreground, each with a set of eyes — one with an extra eye, the "third eye." But are these tombstones, or ghosts? They appear as innocent as Casper, but with a far greater knowing. Roberts' simple palette (driven by the chemicals' possibilities, no doubt) — a dusty blue, an almost golden taupe, an even lighter wash of blue-green — offers just the right tone.

The process may indeed be what informs Roberts' paintings; but there's a suggested naiveté that renders them far more beautiful than the limits of his chosen media. And yet, such simplicity is an illusion — rather, these are authentically wise and beautiful paintings.

Casey Roberts' paintings are on view through March 2 at Basile Gallery, Herron School of Art & Design, 735 W. New York St. Call 317-278-9418 or visit [www.herron.iupui.edu](http://www.herron.iupui.edu) for information.

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