

# GALLERIES

## Making begonias oppressively brutish

BY MARK JENKINS

Rendered with a confident balance of realism and spontaneity, Yevgeniy Fiks's large, square-format flower paintings all depict red begonias. They appear both classical and contemporary, although there's a mechanical, Warhol-like quality that's clearly modern. What really tips the balance is the series' title, "Kimjongilias." All these near-identical blooms are hybrids devised to honor one of the last relics of 20th-century ideology: the communist dictator of North Korea, Kim Jong-Il, who died last year.

Warhol's repetitions either mocked or celebrated — take your pick — the uniformity of consumer mass culture. Fiks's paintings, showing at Galerie Blue Square, are more ominous. Indirectly but powerfully, they comment on an assembly-line culture in which every person is shaped to a uniform mind-set and bred to serve a single master. Fiks has a natural interest in this sort of social and intellectual domination. The artist was born in Moscow in 1972, when the Soviet Union controlled its citizenry with a similar brutishness.

Now based in New York, Fiks can have a more playful perspective on authoritarianism. His other conceptual series at the gallery is the "Magnitogorsk Guide to the National Gallery of Art," named for a steel-making city developed under Stalin's five-year economic plans. One way the Soviet Union financed its rapid industrialization was to sell works from the Hermitage, including paintings by Botticelli, Titian, Raphael and Rembrandt that ended up in Washington. Fiks combined small reproductions of these masterpieces with the cover of the 1933 "Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy of the U.S.S.R.," the first edition to be



**CULT-IVATING BEAUTY:** The blooms in Yevgeniy Fiks's "Kimjongilias" hint at mind control in North Korea, which associated the flower hybrid with its late dictator.

published in English. Then he printed the combined images on metal, a suitably industrial material. The result is a pungent reminder of the tangled relationship between politics and art — and the simple one between art and money.

**Carol Brown Goldberg**

Carol Brown Goldberg takes functional things and makes them useless. Her show at GWU's Luther W. Brady Gallery, "Sculpture and Works on Paper," includes drawings that repurpose the symbols of maps, graphs and meteorological charts in abstract compositions. It also features two arrays of bronze sculptures that puckishly combine the forms of ordinary domestic objects, from faucets and egg slicers to telephones and

hair dryers.

Goldberg, a longtime local artist who used to teach at American University, invokes surrealist Andre Breton and his circle's use of "automatic writing," a technique for (allegedly) allowing the subconscious to take control of one's pen. Her work also recalls surrealist Marcel Duchamp, who exhibited mass-produced everyday objects as sculpture. But where those precursors subverted traditional aesthetics with the messy and the banal, Goldberg takes a tidier approach.

Her drawings and mixed-media works, often on handmade paper, might have a doodlelike offhandedness. Yet they're elegantly organized, the colors and shapes complementary and harmonious. The sculpture is cheekier, because it

dares to pull objects out of kitchen drawers and present them as art. Goldberg arranges the commonplace stuff in artful juxtapositions — a light socket melds with a pitcher, a bellows camera balances on an iron — and then exalts the unions by casting them in bronze. Skeptics of modern art might find Goldberg's work perplexing, but most would have to concede that it's beautifully executed.

**Bethel Aniaku**

A collagist as much as a painter, Bethel Aniaku builds patchwork compositions that include shards of text as well as impastoed paint. His pictures can be as simple as "Landscape," which is basically just two bands of heavily worked color, or as complex as "Stage of Great People," which incorporates chunks of a reproduction of the wanted poster for John Wilkes Booth. What links all the paintings in Aniaku's show "Instinct of Desire" are their earth tones. The Togo-born local artist applies tans, browns and yellows in thick, lumpy rectangles, often layering oil paint over acrylic. The color and texture resemble clay and earth, implicitly evoking the African landscape.

That's not all there is to Aniaku's work at Parish Gallery, but such titles as "Mother Land" suggest that home is a constant theme. So does his use of wood, which pays tribute to his carpenter ancestors. "My Note Book" is painted on a wooden panel, and "Schedule" incorporates a wooden ruler. This set of paintings is mostly on canvas, usually mounted on stretchers but sometimes hanging loosely on the wall. The latter pieces suggest tapestries, another echo of practical crafts in art that's abstract and personal, yet with a strong sense of communal tradition.

**Peter Charles**

At first glance, Peter Charles's work seems simply to combine two bygone decorative traditions: early American toleware (trays and bowls made of thin metal) and Japanese folding screens. But Charles, whose "Painted Screens" is on display at Cross Mackenzie Gallery, isn't just an artisan with a taste for antique techniques and materials. He's a Georgetown University studio art professor who incorporates art history references into his three-dimensional pieces and sometimes crimps his hand-cut metalwork into eccentric, impractical shapes.

Like the artisans who developed these forms centuries ago, Charles often takes pictorial motifs from nature; vines, flowers and branches embellish the paper and metal. He also appropriates pictures from Japanese ukiyo-e prints and well-known Western



CAROL BROWN GOLDBERG, GREG STALEY AND LUTHER W. BRADY ART GALLERY

**FOUND ITEMS:** Carol Brown Goldberg evokes Marcel Duchamp with bronze sculptures made from common domestic objects.



PARISH GALLERY-GEORGETOWN

**PICTURE OF HOME:** Earth tones in "Mother Land" and the other paintings by Bethel Aniaku convey the artist's native Togo.

paintings. But he gives these familiar images a contemporary spin: The cord to a set of iPod earbuds intertwines with vegetation, and the backs of the screens have simplified versions of what's on the front — sometimes so simplified that they've been reduced to a pattern of pixels. The pixels are painted, not produced by digital photography, but they're another reflection of Charles's interest in observing, and depicting, the world from multiple angles.

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**YEVGENIY FIKS**

on view through April 14 at Galerie Blue Square, 1662 33rd St. NW. Call 202-957-1401 or www.galeriebluesquare.com.

**CAROL BROWN GOLDBERG: SCULPTURE AND WORKS ON PAPER**

on view through April 20 at George Washington University Luther W. Brady Gallery, 805 21st St. NW, second floor. Call 202-994-1525 or visit www.gwu.edu/~bradyart.

**BETHEL ANIAKU: INSTINCT OF DESIRE**

on view through April 17 at Parish Gallery, 1054 31st St. NW. Call 202-944-2310 or visit www.parishgallery.com.

**PETER CHARLES: PAINTED SCREENS**

on view through Wednesday at Cross Mackenzie Gallery, 2026 R St. NW. Call 202-333-7070 or visit www.crossmackenzie.com.

**CROSSYNERGY CROSSWORD "TAKE CHARGE"**

- ACROSS**
- Good at coin magic, say
  - Wise guys?
  - Less than average tide
  - Black-and-white cookie
  - First-stringers
  - Shamu, for one
  - Vague
  - Catch with a rope
  - Champagne designation
  - Take charge at the immunization clinic?
  - Of an Andean empire
  - Beetle in comic strips
  - Take charge on the gridiron?
  - December 24 and December 31, notably
  - Michelle, to Barack
  - Much-impersonated singer
  - "Out of sight!"
  - Far from holy
  - "We \_\_\_ Family" (1979 song)
  - Make waves
  - Per item
  - Hawaiian shindig
  - Take charge at the fashion show?
  - What some scouts seek
  - Kicks into the kitty
  - Take charge in the henhouse?
  - QED center
  - Past due
  - "Return of the Jedi" forest dweller
  - Word after pen or pet
  - Electrical usage tracker
  - Puerto \_\_\_
  - Former Russian despot
  - Take a magnet to a videotape, e.g.
  - Minor shortcomings

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- DOWN**
- Homer Simpson's cry
  - Timeline division
  - Tasseled headwear
  - Hot Wheels, e.g.
  - Retailer's place
  - Catchall abbr.
  - It's often out on a limb
  - State identifier at the Miss America pageant
  - Microscope organism
  - San Francisco neighborhood
  - Swashbuckling Flynn
  - Sharp, as pain
  - Easily duped sort
  - The least bit
  - Events held in garages
  - Bakery writers
  - Like some military forces
  - Doctrine
  - First prime number

- Stowaway
- D-sharp equivalent
- Smooth-barked tree
- Boast of
- Plenty sore
- Who-ville's creator
- Treaty-signing site of 1814
- "\_\_\_ walks in beauty ..."
- Containing more sugar
- Light source
- In
- \_\_\_ de deux (ballet dance)
- Former Mississippi senator Lott
- Star qualities
- Alpaca relative
- Pretty pitcher
- Sultry Hayworth
- Small bills
- Shrek, for one
- Nintendo debut of 2006
- Nov. preceder
- Ring endings (abbr.)

**THURSDAY'S CROSSYNERGY SOLUTION**

Q	U	E	R	I	C	E	S	H	T	T	P			
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## Iraq corrupts Marine's 'purity of service'

BOOK WORLD FROM CI

walked the grounds of their de facto "estates," a few acres of farmland, a brook, a river that needed damming (both Benjamin and the resident beavers had a try at it). There were pits to be scraped out, cellars to be cleaned, rusting detritus of every description to be hauled away.

To defend their various rural homes against imaginary enemies, Benjamin built forts with turrets and once cleared out a cellar so thoroughly that the building above it threatened to collapse, and the cellar had to be filled back in by Benjamin post-haste.

His childhood could be described as a series of valiant failures, and his refusal to tell his stories in any chronological way makes it confusing to keep track of which building project followed which — except for the time in England (where his father was teaching) when Benjamin, about 8, took one look at the place and decided to go home. He figured flying would be easier than sailing and set to work building an airplane covered by tin foil in his alley. When a grown-up told him it would never work, Benjamin asked him why. "Metal fatigue" was the kind but inaccurate answer. From then on, Busch — who divides his book into chapters titled "Stone," "Ash," "Blood," "Wood" and so on — considers metal a little frail, maybe weaker than some of the other elements he deals with here.

So what we come to see, as Benjamin grows up, is an eccentric kid, absent from his home from breakfast to dinner, continu-

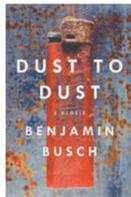
ally getting himself into trouble — scrapes, cuts, broken bones and the affliction of being a misfit.

His life's dream is to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps, and he manages to do so, but he gets into Officers Candidate School after his junior year at Vassar and is cruelly nicknamed "Women's College." He's also an art major, marries a Russian scholar and works, between deployments, as an actor on episodes of "The Wire." Complicated. But then he's complicated.

The tone here is sonorous and dignified, except for the few times he quotes himself in dialogue,

chance to recite that crazy line, with its overtone of H. Rider Haggard.

We don't really ever learn why he wanted to be a Marine, and he never makes his disillusion (if any) apparent to the reader. He does allow himself a few sentences on the subject, however. Over the years his risk-taking and constant exposure to the elements have pretty much wrecked his body. He can't do what he used to do anymore. But it's more than that. "The purity of service had been corrupted by the moral ambivalence of political language," he writes. "My days were not condemned by the



*Most of the time dignity prevails, until one humid evening in the Mideast, when Saddam Hussein was still alive and on the loose.*

when he uses the F-word or recites "Monty Python" skits, but most of the time dignity prevails, until one humid evening in the Mideast, when Saddam Hussein was still alive and on the loose. Busch, in an executive position, is overseeing a crowded meeting of tribal elders. A little boy comes in with a message. It is a death threat for the author, who draws himself up and remarks sagely, "I cannot be killed by conventional means." Although he's suffering from a vicious virus, he manages to keep from throwing up or fainting and finishes the evening basking in the goodwill of the Iraqis. You get the feeling that Busch has lived most of his life waiting for a

things I had expected. It was the pointlessness and the faces of people who were left to live in the violence we had brought with us or had drawn to us."

By the end of this christaline, layered memoir, Busch is not a broken man, but he may have sent himself, ultimately, on a lifelong wild goose chase, and the realization comes hard.

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See reviews books regularly for The Post.

On Monday, Benjamin Busch will be at Politics and Prose, 5015 Connecticut Ave. NW. 202-364-1919.