

Every picture tells a story for narrative artists Paul Morstad, Anna Boghiguian

Contemporary artists use narrative techniques but allow viewers to draw their own conclusions.



JOHN POHL, SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE

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Paul Morstad's *Baby Grand Bagatelle*, in which Beethoven sits at a piano on the back of an endangered whale, shows how the artist uses 19th-century history to address modern issues. *GALERIE YOUN*

Juno Youn says he isn't against abstract or conceptual art; it just happens that what he shows most in his gallery on St-Laurent Blvd. is known as narrative art — art that tells a story, no matter how difficult it may be to “read.”

Narrative art is as old as art itself — as old as the paintings of animals made by cave dwellers as many as 40,000 years ago. Only in the 20th century did formal and conceptual concerns become central; even then, artists have reinvented narrative art by mining the objects and materials of contemporary culture to address personal and social issues.

Paul Morstad does it a little differently: he uses 19th-century history to address current issues.

Morstad's *Baby Grand Bagatelle*, an ink-and-watercolour painting that will be displayed in a group exhibition at Galerie Youn starting Jan. 9, is a good example of his approach to narrative art.

The painting shows Beethoven sitting at a piano on the back of a whale, playing one of the bagatelles that were his final compositions. It may seem whimsical, but the intent is serious.

“I thought the idea of a wizened Beethoven seated at a smoking baby grand piano would make a plaintive setting and perhaps symbolize the end of the great composer's time as well as the tenuous existence of the endangered southern right whale,” he wrote in an email.

The southern right whale, as well as the pelicans escaping the smoking piano, are anatomically correct, according to this “wannabe zoologist.”

Morstad said he wasn't good enough at math and science to reach a childhood goal of becoming a biologist. But “biology came back into my life” as an artist whose subjects are animals and the environment, he said.

Putting the endangered whale into context with Beethoven in the

19th century refers to the time that produced “the root causes of our present predicament,” Morstad said. “The great extinctions of the 1800s coincided with the onset of the industrial revolution, so my themes often involve both the lost species and the man-made detritus of this era.”

Morstad is a Vancouver artist who spent 10 years working in animation at the National Film Board in Montreal. He cites such influences as the surrealist works of Asian and eastern European filmmakers, including Japan’s Hayao Miyazaki, as well as early NFB shorts.



Christine Kim’s ambiguous *Too Much and Too Little IV* shows the silhouette of a woman obscured further by lace.

Christine Kim’s watercolour and cut-paper works are more enigmatic. *Too Much and Too Little IV*, which is also in the exhibition at Galerie Youn, shows the silhouette of a woman obscured further by lace.

Andrea Carson Barker, who wrote a catalogue essay for an earlier Kim exhibition, describes the lace as a

confessional screen “that provides anonymity while inviting truth,” an ambiguity open to interpretation.

Anna Boghiguian, a narrative artist who is interested in the world’s marginalized citizens, is featured at SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art. Boghiguian, who turns 70 this month, studied art at Concordia but was “unknown” until her discovery by a French curator about five years ago. Since then, she has exhibited at Documenta and other major venues, including the São Paulo biennial in 2013.

She draws so constantly that her artworks, combined with text, constitute a visual diary. At Documenta in 2012, Boghiguian’s drawings were shown alongside the similarly constructed gouache paintings of German-Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon, who died at Auschwitz.

Boghiguian’s crude but lively drawings are made from observation during



Anna Boghiguan's interest in the marginalized is clear in *An Incident*, a series in which Egyptian teenage girls are jailed for discussing the country's economic system in public.

her constant travels, said exhibitions manager Julia Smith. They are used effectively in an installation at SBC that focuses on life along the rivers of Brazil, Ethiopia, India and her native Egypt.

Mickey Mouse ears appear as symbols of global capitalism in a parade of puppet refugees that runs along one wall. There are drawings set on the

Amazon River drawn in beeswax on banana leaves, and a separate room entered through a tunnel of 234 beehives. Here visitors find portraits of the characters from her script about an incident in Egypt in which teenage girls are imprisoned for discussing the country's economic situation in public.

"Nothing is clear; the viewer creates (their) own narration," Smith said. "She resists the idea of a national space."

AT A GLANCE

An exhibition of gallery artists opens on Jan. 9 and continues to Feb. 28 at Galerie Youn, 5226 St-Laurent Blvd. For more information, visit [galerieyoun.com](http://www.galerieyoun.com/) (<http://www.galerieyoun.com/>).

Anna Boghiguan: Cities by the Rivers continues to Jan. 16 at SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, 372 Ste-Catherine St. W., Suite 507. For more information, visit [sbcgallery.ca](http://www.sbcgallery.ca/#!anna-boghiguan-en/c1t36) (<http://www.sbcgallery.ca/#!anna-boghiguan-en/c1t36>).

Now to Feb. 27: The Mexican consulate is showing *The Overflow of the Logic of Productivity*, an exhibition of photographs, prints, drawings, sculptures and installations by 14 artists, including William Kentridge and Abraham Cruzvillegas, who recently exhibited at Tate Modern in London.

The works question economic concepts like productivity and exchange value.

Espacio México, 2055 Peel St. For more information,

visit consulmex.sre.gob.mx/montreal

(<http://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/montreal/index.php/en/component/content/article/9-espacio-mexico/230-exposicion-desbordamientos-de-la-logica-de-la-productividad>).

Jan. 7, 14, 21 and 28, 5 p.m.: Guided tours that focus on one or two of the 23 case studies included in the exhibition *The Other Architect* are given in English at the Canadian Centre for Architecture.

Jan. 14, 21 and 28, 6 p.m.: Lectures are given in connection with the exhibition. On Jan. 14, Bradley Samuels of SITU explores an expanded role for architecture, from human rights and public policy to earth science and workspace design. On Jan. 21, two members of Assemble discuss their work, including their rebuilding of a derelict neighbourhood in Liverpool with local residents, for which they were awarded the Turner Prize.

Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1920 Baile St. For more information, visit cca.qc.ca (<http://www.cca.qc.ca/en/education-events>).

Jan. 10, 2 p.m.: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts screens *Finding Vivian Maier*, a documentary by John Maloof and Charlie Siskel about the Chicago nanny whose work — 150,000 photos of street life taken over 40 years — only became widely known when posted on Flickr after her death in 2009. The film is part of FIFA+, a collaboration between the museum and the International Festival of Films on Art.

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1379 Sherbrooke St. W. For more information, visit [mbam.qc.ca](https://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/whats-on/event/finding-vivian-maier/) (<https://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/whats-on/event/finding-vivian-maier/>).

Jan. 12, 5:30 p.m.: The exhibition *Do It Montréal* opens at Galerie de

l'UQÀM. Ten Quebec artists will show works based on instructions that have been interpreted by 400 artists at Do It exhibitions in 30 countries since 1993. The project is meant to question the role and function of curating and exhibiting art.

Do It Montréal continues to Feb. 20 at Galerie de l'UQÀM, 1400 Berri St. For more information, visit galerie.uqam.ca (<http://galerie.uqam.ca/en/home.html>).

Jan. 21: Beaux-arts des Amériques presents a juried exhibition of works inspired by a text. The artists chosen will be those who best express in visual language what the text suggests.

A New York State of Mind, the current exhibition, brings together two artists — one born in Quebec, the other in France — who spent their formative years in the New York City of the abstract expressionists.

Poetry Unspoken opens Jan. 21 and continues to March 12 at Beaux-arts des Amériques, 3944 St-Denis St. A New York State of Mind: Nicke Gorney and Jean-Jacques Duval continues to Jan. 16. For more information, visit beauxartsdesameriques.com (<http://beauxartsdesameriques.com/site/>).

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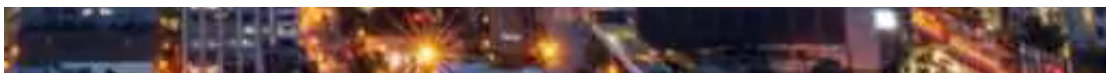


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