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Review: Cris Worley gallery pairing finds magic in contrast, tension

Celia Eberle's eerie vistas and William Cannings' Pop-tinged steel sculptures enrich one another in a quietly resonant curatorial match.



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William Cannings' "Free Speech VI" is part of a series that appears to show how free speech can degrade over time. The 2026 works — made of inflated steel, acrylic urethane paint and a rubber valve — are on display through Feb. 14 at Cris Worley Fine Arts in Dallas.
CRIS WORLEY FINE ARTS

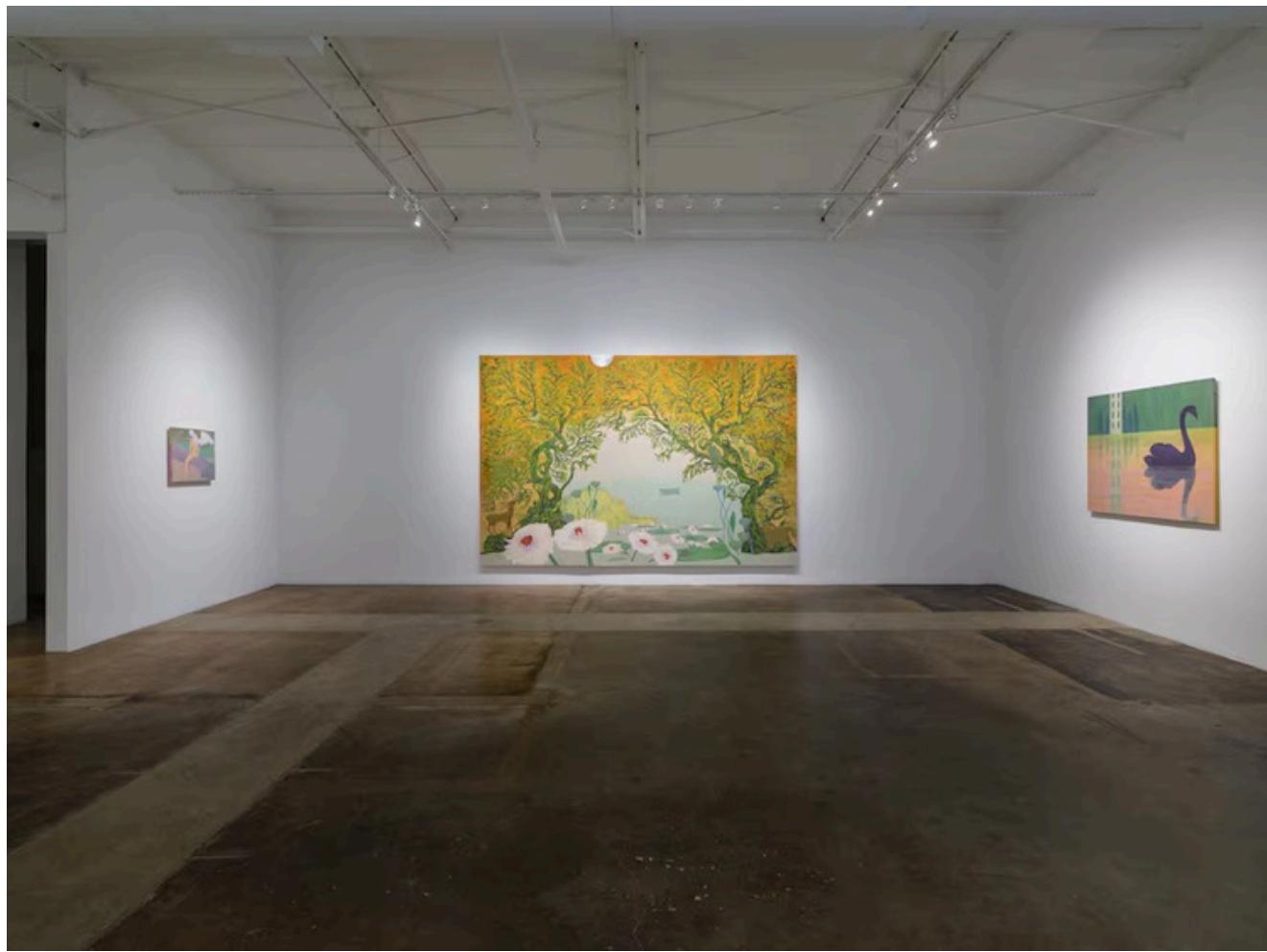


One of the pleasures of gallery-going is that a particular itinerary can create, in a visitor's mind, interactions among the disparate artworks encountered on the same trip. As a case in point, the two shows now smartly juxtaposed at Cris Worley Fine Arts, despite their artists' quite different methods and subjects, provoked for me similar questions about nature and artifice, enchantment and disenchantment.

In one room, the lush landscape paintings of East Texas-born, Dallas-based Celia Eberle evoke a fairy-tale atmosphere (one of them is titled *Eden*) but also unsettle that atmosphere through the melancholic emptiness of their subjects, and the subtle artificiality of their media. In the adjacent room, the sculptures of England-born, Lubbock-based William Cannings, seemingly floating in air and decked out in garish colors, look at first like weightless, disposable decorations from a party supply store, before revealing themselves to be made from hard, unyielding steel.

Eberle's glowing pinks, yellows, oranges and purples, coloring an environment sparsely populated by wild creatures (bluebirds, foxes, cheetahs) and mythic figures (archers, angels), suggest the fin-de-siècle luxury of a Maurice Denis or Pierre Bonnard painting. Her chosen media, however — acrylic paint, glitter and architectural foam insulation board — give the scenes a sense of artificiality and insubstantiality, described in the artist's statement as a "post-human, post-natural world" of "forsaken potential" and "quiet abandonment."

In *Eden*, the 12-foot-wide centerpiece of the show, two thickly grown mossy green trees, nibbled by deer and moth, frame an opening onto a misty lake or river, with lily pads in the foreground and a single rowboat in the background. This view is surrounded by nine smaller and simpler paintings. Many of them, such as *Pink Lagoon* and *The Angels Exit*, have just one or two elegantly shaped, but faceless and impassive figures against a simple background; a busier exception is *Bluebirds and Storm Clouds*, with its thickly clustered birds unnaturally swirling about.



Dallas-based artist Celia Eberle evokes a fairytale atmosphere with "Eden," the 12-foot-wide centerpiece of the show.
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Eberle's title, *The Angels Exit*, refers to both a stage direction and "the quiet withdrawal of transcendence from the contemporary world." Nevertheless, my reaction to seeing the works was that the exiting or withdrawal was not quite complete — that something transcendent was still around, against the odds, like the angels incongruously haunting Cold War Berlin in Wim Wenders' classic film *Wings of Desire*. After all, the angels, archers and such are still visible in Eberle's paintings, and their overall mood is far from that of a cold wasteland.

Cannings' sculptures have a similar ambiguity. On a surface level, they simply take some kind of disposable object, a prop or accessory, and elevate its status to that of a work of art. When done by Andy Warhol or Jeff Koons, this approach can suggest a mocking irony, sending up the very idea of permanence or monumentality.

Elements of Cannings' work, however, hint at a different perspective. One instance of this is the gilded, inflated pair of wings mounted trophy-like on the wall. Looking at this piece with Eberle's melancholic exiting angels in mind (having just seen them in the other room), Cannings' trophy wings seemed more serious than their jokey pop counterparts. I imagined them to be the equipment of an angel who had retired from the game (as one hangs up one's spurs), souvenirs of an earlier age. The most notable work in Cannings' show for me is the series of six pink dialogue balloons titled

Free Speech. Again, the combination of the bright, sugary pink color and the squeezed, distorted blobby shapes at first suggested a Koonsian silliness. But after a while, the works' subject — a sacred one in American society— emerged instead as quite serious.

The *Free Speech* sculptures could be seen as referring to the way that speech can degrade, in the context of mass culture, into becoming a mere object, as suggested in different ways by an earlier generation of artists including Ed Ruscha and Marcel Broodthaers. But Cannings' work put me in mind more specifically of the online cacophony, the barrage of short messages in an online comments section that signify nothing. That Cannings' method involves pumping hot air into the welded steel balloons seems appropriate.



William Cannings' 2025 work "Wings" pairs nicely with Celia Eberle's melancholic angels in the adjoining exhibition.
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In William Cannings' "Free Speech II," the steel balloon appears to be deflating.
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Seeing these two shows together (Cannings' 10th and Eberle's seventh with Worley) gave me a renewed appreciation for the craft of curating a gallery's program, and how a good program is more than the sum of its parts. Despite not having many on-paper commonalities, the two sets of work synthesized wonderfully into an overall coherent presentation.

Details

"Celia Eberle: The Angels Exit" and "William Cannings: Suspense of Disbelief" continue through Feb. 14 at Cris Worley Fine Arts, 1845 E. Levee St., Suite 110, Dallas. Free. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 214-745-1415 or visit crisworley.com.