

# WEEKLY Volcano

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## VISUAL edge



'Still Life with Bank Robber,' 2003, stained glass in lightbox, by Judith Schaechter

## Extra Virgin

DO NOT MISS THIS EXHIBIT! BY ALEC CLAYTON

If you see only one art exhibit this spring, make it "Extra Virgin: Work by JUDITH SCHAECHTER" at the Museum of Glass.

Schaechter is a stained glass artist like no other as well, actually very much like many others, from early Gothic artists and artists of the Northern Italian Renaissance to modern masters. In technique and sensibility, she is steeped in the history of stained glass, but her images are uniquely her own.

The exhibition includes 22 stained glass works in individual light boxes,

### VISUAL ARTS

and 14 pencil drawings. Many of the narrative

threads in her works examine contemporary themes such as death, violence, sex and romance. Others recast fairy tales in ways that reflect both modern realities and the original tales that gave birth to many a popular children's story, many of which tended to be exceedingly grim. Others present personal dream imagery that exposes great psychological depths.

Schaechter shies away from nothing. The pictures are confrontational and in no way comfortable. They fearlessly examine the horror and the beauty of what it means to be fully human.

Although these works are "not meant to shock or repel the viewer," said assistant curator Tara McDonnell, "(their) graphic nature engages and compels us to contemplate these beautifully rendered scenes that so eloquently express the inner turmoil associated with terrible circumstances."

The images, especially the human figures, are done in a style that blends surrealism, cartoon drawing and realism. This somewhat eclectic style lends itself perfectly to the artist's vision of the world, which runs the gamut from outrage to hilarity.

Well over half of the pictures in the exhibition include a woman as a central figure. She appears in many guises — lover, friend, dreamer, murderess and victim, to name a few — but she is nearly always the same woman. She has a slim and voluptuous figure; she is pictured nude or swathed in flowing gowns, with a head about four times the size it should be and with a range of emotions clearly reflected in her facial expressions.

In "Still Life with Bank Robber" she is a corpse laid out on a black-and-white tile floor, the murder weapon and other clues arrayed in a circular pattern around her like pieces in a board game.

In "Dutch Tile Fever" she is sick unto death, propped on a pillow on a bed on a decorative carpet and surrounded by decorative tiles. Everything is pretty and precise except for the woman, whose pain is unbearable.

In "Full Frontal Excitement" she is exciting herself in ways that leave nothing to the imagination. But she does not appear to be the least bit excited.

Beyond the quirky stories told or implied in these works, they can and should be appreciated for their visual beauty. Schaechter's drawing is exquisite, which is most clearly evident in the pencil drawings of single female figures. If it were not for their slightly contorted positions and the absurdly large heads, these figures could easily be from Renaissance masters like Botticelli or Titian.

The etched and sandblasted figures in her stained glass pieces are fully modeled with the kind of subtle shading one would expect of an oil painting. The technique she uses, called flash glass, involves painting overlapping sheets of glass with intense colors on the top layers and subdued colors on lower layers, which creates both actual and illusory depth and allows for very dense patterning without the patterns competing with the central figures.

The Judith Schaechter exhibition runs through Aug. 1 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, third Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., \$4-\$10, free every third Thursday 5-8 p.m., 1801 Dock St., downtown Tacoma, (253) 396-1768.