

DSO hosts art exhibition by Detroit artists

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Melanie Manos uses herself in many of her works, including “Hanging On,” which is part of the exhibit at the DSO. *(Photo: Melanie Manos)*

Call it a collision of the fine arts.

When Anne Parsons, president and CEO of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, asked Hamtramck gallerist Steve Pantan to curate an art exhibition in the Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, he was excited, but had a couple concerns.

Principally, any art show in The Max’s dramatic, three-story space had to contend with one inescapable fact: Visitors come for music, not art. So whatever’s hanging on the walls needs special punch to attract attention.

“Anne is very much about engaging the audience in different ways,” Pantan explained Thursday on a walk around the “Art @ The Max” exhibit. “But the key thing is that the works be really engaging.”

Panton's strategy was to pick pieces "with sufficient presence to draw casual viewers in, and memorable enough to have visitors asking questions long after they leave." The show, underwritten by the Eugene & Marcia Applebaum Family Foundation, will be up through April 12. It's all part of Parsons' plan to make art exhibitions an ongoing part of life at The Max — an ambition, she said, that was part of the planning when the building was initially conceived.

"The Max is a great space for showing art and mixing media," she noted. "And we're so excited it's Detroit artists we're able to promote."

The eight artists on display, including several former Kresge Artist Fellows, are all well-regarded names in Detroit's expanding art community.

Visitors are likely to be grabbed and amused by Melanie Manos' "Hanging On," which perfectly embodies Panton's search for art with presence. In this huge color photograph, Manos — who uses herself in most of her work — seems to be hanging by her fingertips from an upside-down stairwell.

"Melanie uses her body as a commentary on social conditions," Panton explained, "and there's an element of the cinematic to her work. She's a great fan of silent movies." Indeed, this Escher-like visual puzzle will likely remind many of the famous image of Buster Keaton dangling from a skyscraper window ledge.

"I love Melanie's photo," said Parsons, "though I'm trying hard not to have a favorite."

Equally amusing in its way, and guaranteed to generate reaction, is Renata Palubinskas' "Grand Rabbits," which greets visitors at the top of the stairway to The Max's third level.

Bunnies are generally tied to the cute and adorable, but Palubinskas gives us three towering giants, cheerfully marauding their way through city streets a bit like the "Stay-Puft" marshmallow-guy at the end of "Ghostbusters."

By contrast, Saffell Gardner's "62 Years of Rage" is a conceptual piece of striking simplicity inspired by recent police killings of young black men.

Gardner wadded-up a large, painted canvas from his 1987 MFA thesis, and hung it from the top of a large stepladder, which in turn is suspended from the wall several feet above the floor.

Both humorous and oddly disturbing is Andy Krieger's "The Drink," 11 small dioramas lined up in a row in which the same man, seen from various angles in a cozy dining room, downs his glass of beer.

The panels, Krieger said, represent just seven seconds in the drinker's life — minute observation that he calls "an epic poem of the everyday."

Other works are by Corrie Baldauf, Olayami Dabls, Robert Sestok and the Zimbabwe Cultural Centre of Detroit.

Parsons, who's also brought yoga classes and the Detroit Public Theatre into The Max, anticipates more artistic crossover.

"I think it's important we think openly about 'the arts,' and their impact on our lives," she said. "We hope this help give our patrons a more multi-dimensional experience. And we certainly hope to help the artists get exposure."

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'Art @ The Max'

Through April 12

Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center

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Open only during performances and other events

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dso.org.