

READING EAGLE

Art review: The intellectual rebellion of Jay Ressler

- By Ron Schira - Reading Eagle correspondent

- Jan 15, 2017

A selection of 46 digitally manipulated photographs titled "Seven Deadly Sins (and some not so sinful)," by Hamburg resident Jay Ressler, is viewing now through Jan. 29 at Clay on Main Studio in Oley. The images are run through graphics software and enmeshed in a mashup of superimposed ironic commentaries regarding the politics and attitudes of contemporary life and society.

Ressler, a lifelong proponent of photography, graduated from Albright College with a degree in psychology and moved to the Pittsburgh area for employment. He spent much of his working years in industry and coal mining, returning to Berks upon his retirement to pursue his art form. He and his wife, Martha, a quilter and fabric artist, are frequent exhibitors within the Reading art scene.

The work in this show contains samplings from four series of photos, a few photo-encastics and the title series of "Deadly Sins." This grouping encompasses 17 photos and are hung sequentially in the rear room. Every one is a palimpsest of still shots taken from video, film and internet sources such as movie previews, the online news or Taking his cue also from literary references, specifically Dante's "Inferno" and Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," he identifies them as greed, lust, pride, gluttony, wrath, envy and sloth, with illustrative examples for each. Accompanying these pieces are descriptive labels and a QR scan code for those with readers on their phones. The code sends you to his website for more information on individual works.

Of course, some of them work better than others, as he occasionally overcrowds the pictures with content, making you wonder exactly what it is you're looking at. Faces,

landscape, nature scenes and more have a dreamlike quality that drifts in and out of the picture plane, bringing one or another aspect of the work into focus.

"Pride," for instance, presents three shadowy faces with a spiderweb windshield crack superimposed, and punctuated with a rose. Mysterious and dark, the piece echoes his psych training with Freudian suppositions of ego, self and superego, which is shattered behind a clear screen of observation.

For a few of them he has attached a small object. "The Fog of War," for another instance, coats the symbolic photo-imposure of flowers and thorns with a smoky wax and affixes a branch to the surface, suggesting that war is not natural and lies permeate the origins of conflict.

One piece titled "I Can't Breathe" brings the last words of Eric Garner's wrongful death by a police officer's chokehold to be reminiscent of Spike Lee's movie "Do the Right Thing," where a similar death was enacted in film almost 30 years ago. The pure wrongness of it has resonated through the country and into his photos.

It must be said, too, that these heavily worked photographs are more aligned with his open view of society's ills, with any religious viewpoint as a given for whatever faith or belief to which one aspires.

I found this work to be excellently researched, maybe too much, and properly outraged at the way things are of late. In fact, it seems inevitable that this type of intellectual rebelliousness would now enter the art world and relate both the voice of artists and people in general.

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