

Arts almanac

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ART ON VIEW

Many facets to Diamond's sculpture show

One of sculptor Harriet Diamond's small three-dimensional scenes is called "So Many Good-Byes." The words nail the Northampton artist's goal of harvesting human moments and stilling them in terra cotta or bronze — where, rather than be boldly enduring, they appear all the more fragile.

Through this week, Diamond is showing a dozen works she calls vignettes in which small figures act out ordinary moments in spaces that help define who they are and what they care about.

In "So Many Good-Byes," on view at the Grubbs Gallery at the Williston Northampton School, we see an old couple waving from steps outside their house.

Something in the way they stand there, before an open front door, suggests the couple is bidding farewell to family. It's where this Mom and Dad always give the gift of a good-bye. Circling the piece, a viewer gets to see the farewells from the perspective of those pulling away in a car, say, as well as from inside the house looking out between two columns that hold up a porch roof.

This scene, like others here, strikes an emotional chord. The best of Diamond's vignettes then deliver more: intriguing physical details that show people even more for what they are.

Diamond pulls a more contained feeling from "At The Dinner Table" (pictured here). This time the couple

has only each other, as he carves a roast, she speaks and gestures. They have their familiar goblets and their table, a surface that's been the stage for family dramas.

Diamond's figures are loosely modeled and retain a sense of her touch. Rather than toil away at realism, Diamond renders the way her people feel, from the inside out. They relax. They slump. They don't know they're being watched. You see it in the wide-legged nonchalance of two nudists, in a hand-painted terra cotta vignette.

Place has a place here, and Diamond finds novel ways of suggesting space around her figures. She constructs part of the inside of a house in "The Front Hall," another painted terra cotta piece. She accentuates the negative, removing ceilings, walls, windows — anything that might clutter her scene. She creates surfaces that hold memory. It is the dust of human deeds she collects.

She finds it in the narrow stairs that climb up around a bend to an incompletely framed door — a place of passage. Downstairs, there is a rumpled-looking radiator, a detail that wants to warm an otherwise stark scene. An old grandfather clock stands apart, near a half-coiled rug; the clock pins down a fourth corner to the scene.

Is that rug coming or going? Is this another good-bye?

The work "In Lee's Studio" provides more surfaces — and more little tokens of narrative.

We see a sculptor work a piece of clay while a plump model sits nude with her back to him. The place is tight and disordered, but rich with artistic intent. A tiny sculpted

figure, hand and feet on a windowsill, evidence of his need to create. You can't help but admire his commitment. Here, Diamond shows that it's not how individual elements in a vignette appear, but how they cluster, and what they add up to.

Diamond gives us another departure in a scene of two musicians packing up instruments — another vignette that boxes a moment within four points. She varies that approach in "The String Quartet," a more dynamic scene that teases out the intimacy that performance demands. The figures are a bit chunky. Their faces, which border on caricature, say simply that making music makes joy.

Diamond's "Horse Pull at the Cummington Fair" is a charming tribute to the folks and folk arts of a country fair. Under little triangular pennants fashioned from newspaper and paint, Diamond sets two beasts loose against a stone weight. As they strain across a dusty yard, and their handlers exhort, others stand in pure idleness. The grandstand is a nearly featureless wash of faces.

The smallest study in the show is called "The Model's Dilemma." There he sits, nude, waiting for something. Again, Diamond's title teases out the moment. What, exactly, is his dilemma?

Is it whether or not to don that jacket on a hangar? Or is he just trying not to look so naked?

"People, Places and Things" runs through Saturday. The gallery is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon.