

### FANTASTICAL, POLITICAL

Fitchburg Art Museum • Fitchburg, MA • [fitchburgartmuseum.org](http://fitchburgartmuseum.org) • Through June 3, 2018

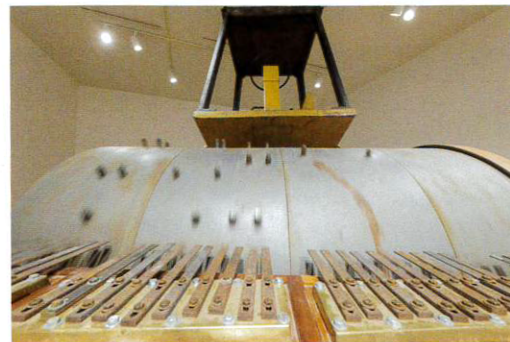
**D**elicious contradictions abound in the subversive *Fantastical, Political*, where appealing surfaces and seemingly quaint ornamentation disclose charged political statements and barbed social commentaries that linger like unhealed wounds.

Each of the five contemporary New England artists here, grouped three to four per room, has very definite things to say, though at first glance that's anything but obvious. Prepare to be seduced by intriguing, whimsical and just plain beautiful surfaces, from which emerge gut-punching assertions, however open-ended.

The show's standout is Dave Cole's *Music Box*, an enormous, 22,000 pound steamroller re-constructed so that its spiked drum turns against a xylophone-like array of rusty metal bars to play a monstrous, labored, basso-profundo version of the *Star-Spangled Banner*. As the full-sized Caterpillar-made machinery's massive drum revolves, the walls echo with the national anthem as you have never heard it before—slow, mechanical, loud and hollow.

Sharing the space are ceramics by Cynthia Consentino that question stereotypes of feminine childhood. Her cutesy Hummel or Madonna figurines turn out to be witty grotesques, offering a twisted take on girlhood fairytale imagery. New Haven-based Mohamad Hafez assembles discarded machinery and other found objects into precise miniatures of bombed-out ruins in his native Damascus, ravaged by the civil war. In *Baggage Series #4*, a ruined three-story building rises from a battered suitcase weighted down with rubble. In a room on the top floor sits a miniature birthday cake (complete with tiny metal candles) abandoned in the center of a table covered in concrete dust.

Joo Lee Kang's lush and elaborate drawings in red ballpoint pen (some reproduced as decorative domestic wallpaper) reference the Baroque still life aesthetic. Her Düreresque renderings of frogs, flora and unidentifiable fauna are based on genetic mutations and species inhabiting the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. Similarly, although Dinorá Justice's work allures



Dave Cole, *The Music Box* (detail), 2012, Caterpillar CS-553 Vibratory Roller-Compactor with cherry wood, spring steel and United States National Anthem (arranged for steamroller), 8 x 19 x 11'. Photo: © 2018 Charles Sternaimolo.

with splashes of Fauvist-like color, her subjects could hardly be called cheerful. She dedicates her large-format paintings to upending conscious or unconscious white, male, European bias.

From Cole's hand grenade baby rattles, *Three Generations*, to Justice's Adam and Eve slyly rendered as Gauguinesque Polynesians, everything in this show is a wonderfully pointed, contradictory construction.

—Christopher Volpe