



"Dark Times #1"

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Less is more van Riel's tiny revelations

"WHEN I get out of the way, the best things happen," says artist Loes van Riel, whose collection of nine mixed-media collages, "Dark Times," is currently on view at Angelo.

Although a jewelry store may not seem like the best venue for an art exhibition, the setting is ideal for van Riel's small, gem-like creations that incorporate gold leaf, bits of gilded screen, and sterling silver spacer beads.

"Dark Times" is not at all what the artist had in mind when she began envisioning the pieces for the series. At the time, van Riel was enamored with using a luminous blue to create her background monotypes. But when she headed off to the printing press, things changed.

"I got there, and there was this pot of black ink," she says, her eyes widening. "I don't know what happened, but I played all day with black ink."

Back in her studio, van Riel began moving a 3.5-inch-square viewfinder over the resulting black-instead-of-blue pages, searching for areas of visual interest. She intended to place tiny paper packets wrapped in silver and gold leaf against the selected sections. But she discovered the silver got lost amid the black and grey of the prints. And, to her surprise, the packets felt wrong.

So van Riel let go. As soon as she did, she

ran across a translation of a Bertolt Brecht poem: "And in the dark times/Will there be singing?/There will be singing/About the dark times." Suddenly, she knew her direction.

The former jeweler began making small paper tubes and cutting bits of metal screen, covering both with gold leaf. She sparingly placed a few of these elements within each monotype square, occasionally adding silver beads and confetti-like bits of paper (a fleck of red turns up in several pieces).

"I knew they had to be reductive—like haiku," she explains, noting that her principle was "How little can I use to create an experience?"

The resulting minimalist collages are set within multi-leveled black matte frames that pull the eye to their centers. Each piece has an elegant stillness suffused with quiet dynamism.

In #1, a tiny square of screen, gleaming against the blackness of the square's upper right, balances two horizontal tubes laid parallel in the paler lower left corner. A minuscule quadrangle of red punctuates the piece.

As with haiku, van Riel's collages thrill by unexpectedly exceeding the sum of their parts.

Loes van Riel's "Dark Times" is on display at Angelo through June 30, 220 East Main St. on the Downtown Mall. 971-9256.