Wheeler, Sinclair mull lingering traces in new shows

By Cate McQuaid

Suzannah Sinclair’s “In the Evening” rya rug, at Samson.

A shag rug sits in the middle of Suzannah Sinclair’s painting show at Samson. Its saturated colors recall a sunset, the chill of evening. The artist made it, and it has a bevy of connotations: garish 1970s decor; a textile historically seen as women’s work. Then, although it’s not a bearskin, it looks as if it’s missing a nude lolling invitingly amid the wool tufts.

That’s because Sinclair’s paintings (expertly done in fussy egg tempera) are inspired by vintage men’s magazines. Using these old, strangely stuffy girlie pictures as a lens, Sinclair examines the gaze, and the packaging of nudes.

The first canvases in the gallery are nudes in which the models look artificially posed, such as “Naturist by the River.” The naturist, with her long hair like Susan Dey on “The Partridge Family,” has her head slightly cocked and one foot placed primly forward — a Barbie doll stance.

In other paintings, Sinclair removes the nude and paints what surrounded her in the original photo.

In “Linda in the Bathtub,” the shower curtain revealingly pulls back, and we see the nuanced play of light on the tiled wall behind, and the trace of Linda’s shadow. In all of these paintings, including the nudes, the woman is both there and not there; she’s a wisp, a fantasy, never intended to be real.

Downstairs at Samson, Alexi Antoniadis, best known as half of the trompe-l’oeil sculpting duo Antoniadis & Stone, has a terrific wall of sculptures up that read as half-hieroglyph, half-figure. (He has larger sculptures and paintings on view, as well, but the wall installation, with its progressions, has the most punch).

Antoniadis cuts and folds these forms out of a flat panel, and they retain their sense of flatness, like drawings struggling toward three-dimensionality. The whole wall could be a hallucinatory yoga manual, with figures in improbable folds and extensions, many with extra limbs. Some are only tenuously figures, but in this mix, the human form can’t be forgotten. It’s a human alphabet, and what it expresses is at times tortured, at times graceful.