

## **“So...What the Hell is it?” works by Brad Ford Smith at Southside, Dallas**

Review by Maria Valentina Sheets

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The red “sold” dots were definitely flying around Janette Kennedy Gallery at the January 12th opening of “So...What the hell is it?” works by Brad Ford Smith. Smith is also a local art conservator who has repaired objects in a wide variety of media for many of the more prestigious art and design collections in Texas for at least twenty years. Not only is he a master in his profession but his profoundly superior technical sensitivity and awareness of surface tension has also been transferred to his own viable creations. Smith’s very organic works are described as “fleshy and familiar”. Some, such as “Blob Files”, a plaster installation in five units, have the chaotic but clean feel of futuristic hieroglyphs. With works in collage, ink jet, silicone, plaster, resin, photography, porcelain, bronze, lacquer and even hand-cut and painted vinyl-peel stickers, there was seemingly something tailored for a great number of patrons who were apparently getting what Brad was saying. But ‘what the hell’ was he saying?

His first listed piece, 44 ink, colored pencil, lacquer, and laser printed images in 3 phases called “Desk Top Drawings”, begins a possible explanation. Appearing scratched and gnarled, covered in traces of glue, wax, pigments, pencil marks, hand tools... Smith shows how a natural work environment can become a creative substrate with new forms inspired by accumulative desk clutter made during daily conservation and artistic gruntings. “Desk Top Drawings” is only part of a large-scale installation piece that he intends to continue because the surface of Smith’s desk is apparently in a constant state of reduction and re-accumulation. It is understood that he cannot separate the two worlds, conservation and artistic creation, entirely. Conservation provides a study of the surface as well as an intimate knowledge of how materials interact. The cellular nature of his forms seem to unavoidably reflect some of the microscopic structures often observed in the study of material sciences or in the patterns of a wood surface. Either that or he is simply, but doubtfully, just a dirty old man. Smith also has created what he calls “Action Figures”, tubular shapes of silicone rubber on plaster bases that can be flexed and manipulated to new forms. And contrary to the typically alarmist attitudes of most conservators when it comes to touching art, Smith encourages physical interaction with his works. Art stalkers might be familiar with his “Loopy Installation Project”, originally composed of thousands of relaxed, jelly-like textured loops each hung by a single pin. Patrons are now able to buy as many of the loops as they want (3 for 10.) and pins are assigned to their new home location on a Dallas City Map. Because of this surprisingly “fun” approach to the display, construction, and dispensation of his work, there seemed to be a very fluid atmosphere translating from his creations and into the social environment itself. Many of us found *ourselves* a bit “loopy” from all of the excitement. It is rare and fortunate that such a skilled craftsman would bother sharing. “So...what the hell is it?” Be sure to go and decide for yourself. The show will be available for viewing until January 31st. at Southside on Lamar in Dallas.

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