

# THE BOSTON GLOBE

GALLERIES

## Viewers enter circle to see what's beyond

By Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent February 25, 2005

### Subversive design

Marshall McLuhan declared "The medium is the message" back in the 1960s. Forty years later, the message, whatever it may be, won't get across unless it's packaged in an appealing way. "Strategic Design," a smart group show at GASP curated by Micah Malone, looks at how design has infiltrated fine art, and how artists subvert it.

Malone's cynical and humorous "Protest Sign Holders" pokes fun at activists, who you might say package themselves to appear outside the mainstream and, in the artist's eyes, tend to protest the flavor of the month. So his sign holders, in bright colors, can display interchangeable signs, depending on the issue of choice.

In the case of David Eckard, the medium creates the message. Eckard crafts Rube Goldberg-like contraptions and takes them to the street. In his video "Scribe," we see him with a portable podium and a megaphone. He drags them to street corners and orates. The giant megaphone obscures his head; his text is so overblown, it's meaningless. The orator has gone to great lengths to call attention to himself, yet he's invisible behind his packaging.

The slow reality of the harvest upturns the pizzazz of fast food in "Fresh Produce." Ned Vena and Nick Dalton look at design we take for granted, in this case a food vendor's cart. They've made their own model, with bags of ice inside. It's a salad bar, but for all the convenience, there's quite a wait: The veggies are still sprouting under lamps positioned above the cart. The viewer can choose an audio track to support their growth -- folk or rap, or a Malcolm X speech.

Barbara Gallucci puts a defeating twist on the utility of storage boxes, here based on the sleek, iconic designs of Charles and Ray Eames. Gallucci's boxes defy use: She crosses steel rods over their openings. She takes the Eames brothers a step beyond function, to the point where it's all about how an item looks.

Bruce Conkle pokes holes in a mythic symbol of the American wilderness, the bearskin rug; his "Sasquatch Pelt" is a teddy-bearskin run, a weird conflation of sweet and fierce. Jonathan Santos riffs on the design of professional presentations, offering up a model of his clever idea to outfit jersey barriers with benches. It's too good an idea; it distracts from the presentation, and presentation is everything in "Strategic Design."

### Strategic Design

At: GASP, 362 Boylston St., Brookline, through March 11. 617-731-2500. [www.g-a-s-p.net](http://www.g-a-s-p.net)

