

USING FOUND OBJECTS, ARTISTS CREATE WORKS THAT GRAPPLE WITH LOSS

[THIRD Edition]

Boston Globe - Boston, Mass.

Author: Cate McQuaid, Globe
Correspondent
Date: Mar 29, 2002
Start Page: F.17
Section: Living
Text Word Count: 1174

Document Text

GALLERIES Time and Motion: Paintings by Caren Canier At: Boston University's Sherman Gallery, 775 Commonwealth Ave., through April 21. 617-358-0295. Lost and Found: Sculpture by Donald Shambroom and Liz Sweibel At: Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, 529 Tremont St., through April 7. 617-426-8835. Band of Outsiders At: HallSpace, 31 Norfolk Ave., through April 13. 617-989-9985.

Caren Canier's mixed-media paintings at the Sherman Gallery at Boston University conflate ancient and modern into clever allegories about time. Twenty-five years ago, Canier won a Rome Prize Fellowship and found herself drawn to ancient ruins. She populates her paintings with collaged prints of Roman statuary; she sets them in a flat, gridded landscape of ruins.

Earlier works, such as "Roof" (1993), often use a clock face to suggest the passage of time, and the straddling of eras in Canier's work. Here, a handless statue sits on a roof by a clock; a landscape stretches behind. Below, figures occupy a set of square rooms. The human element seems small beneath the expanse of space and time depicted above, but the smallness is compelling in its vulnerability and transitory nature.

More recently, Canier has incorporated figures from the stop-motion photography of Eadweard Muybridge. Muybridge sought to document the mechanics of movement with his photography. Canier inserts his figures - sometimes nude, sometimes dressed in the garb of Muybridge's era, the late 19th century - into her modernist ancient settings.

Muybridge's goal may have been scientific, but his figures compel because they're so sweetly human as they move across Canier's canvases. "Coming and Going" (2000) is a stage set of ramps, stairs, and hurdles, with processions of figures striding, climbing, and swinging back and forth. They're mechanical as a soldier's march, yet lyrical: A woman in the foreground looks flirtatious; a man striding up a ramp appears comical in his gawky gait. Canier's subject remains the same: Time passes, much to our astonishment, and as hard as we run, we'll never catch up.

Found, their way

A found object, in art speak, is material with a history. An artist may happen upon a weathered plank, a piece of rubber, or a string of beads and recycle it into a sculpture. As much as such material is found, though, it is also lost: It had a function, a story, a place that it has no more. "Lost and Found," at Mills Gallery in the Boston Center for the Arts, considers how two sculptors use found objects to create what curator Rebecca Tasker calls "an aesthetic of the lost." It's a poignant exhibit laced with unsettling humor.

Donald Shambroom comes to the show at a lost-and-found moment in his personal and artistic life. Shambroom is best known for his light-filled paintings of men floating and hurtling through the sky. After his wife, Mimi, died two years ago, Shambroom put his paints away to turn his attention to a more earthbound art crafted from old furniture. The artist is a student of Marcel Duchamp, who popularized the idea of found art nearly a century ago when he put a urinal on display in a gallery and called it "ready-made art."

There's a strong narrative element to Shambroom's work, but the story is always skewed and surreal. The viewer steps into the artist's dream, populated by traces of presence and impalpable memories as objects transform from functional to metaphoric. In "Mimi" he sets a tall, clear tube on an old, ornate wooden table. Inside, a toy top lies idle while a broom rises above it, bristles upturned, seeming to release a swirl of red hair into the atmosphere. It's as if the artist is trying to capture his wife's essence, a heady, strawberry blond vapor that can be conjured but never caught.

Liz Sweibel's sculptures have fewer discrete elements than Shambroom's, and so they are less narrative and more visceral in their message. "Threshold" features dozens of fine, rusted wires springing from the wall like the quills of an outraged porcupine. She has dipped the tip of each in wax, adding a teary vulnerability to the piece's brushy fury. In "Disappearing Acts," she uses long threads of wire, each pair held together by a series of latex circles - little skinlike nets, clumping and tearing. Delicate as a cobweb, each string recalls a used-up helix of DNA, messily disintegrating.

The rusting, scuffed-up quality of the materials gives the sense that the artists have hauled them out from long-locked closets and brings to mind the threatening locked closets of memory. At the same time, they honor what has gone before by transforming its vestiges into work freighted with the poetry of absence.

Outside looking in

Local artist Mary Behrens puts her curator's cap on for "Band of Outsiders" at HallSpace. The title nods to Jean-Luc Godard's 1964 film of the same name and hopes to echo that movie's darkly comic aesthetic of transgression. It's a quirky show, with more hits than misses. Many of the artists start with the recognizable, then superimpose something over it.

Nils Karsten makes elegant graphite drawings of a boy, then adds in bunny ears, or a mortarboard, or a cowboy hat. This may express the child's dreams or his parents' expectations; he looks sulky, and the additions, therefore, seem an imposition. Melissa

Zexter intricately embroiders colored thread over black and white photographs. "Husband" has a man's astonished face in a corner, overlaid by stitched color.

Monica Rabinowitz sets up a kitchen table with a newspaper's personal ads, a phone, and a cup of tea. Listen to the phone, and a woman describes herself in personal-ad terms; then another voice interrupts, disputing and deconstructing all of the woman's selling points. Real life is messier than an ad. Art falls in between, acknowledging and containing the mess, but making sense of it. That's what most of these outsiders do quite well.

SIDE BAR: Critics' Picks Ongoing Catch it - "Caught" features photographs by Charles Cohen and Amir Zaki and a film installation by Bruce Bemis at Montserrat College of Art Gallery, 23 Essex St., Beverly, through April 6. 978-921-4242.

CATE MCQUAID Teacher feature - Boston University College of Fine Arts Faculty Exhibition 2002 shows work by some of the artists who teach at BU, including Deborah Cornell and Ulrich Mack. Boston University Art Gallery, 855 Commonwealth Ave., through April 7. 617- 353-3329. - C.M. Shows of culture - Jowhara Saud and Sarina Kahn- Reddy explore their Islamic-American identities in shows at the Artists Foundation Gallery, 516 East Second St., South Boston, through April 13. 617-464-3559. - C.M.

Last chance

Eye candy - The Altoids Curiously Strong Collection finishes its Boston stint tomorrow. Clifford-Smith and OHT galleries, 450 Harrison Ave. 617-965-0255.

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