

# Extension Cords and Serendipity

*Voilà! Instant moveable art installation*

By Patricia Rosoff

In those old Andy Hardy movies, the kids would get together to put on a show, combining fresh young talent with a lot of ingenuity (and a stage set to rival Broadway) at the drop of a freckle-faced teenager's cap. It isn't so easy in the real world. Contemporary artists and musicians struggle to get their works seen and performed.

But what made those movies so fun back in the forties is precisely what makes the local low-budget, moveable installations stage-managed by David Borawski so charming in the nineties. Except that Borawski's "shows" really *are* something put together out of thin air, talent and a dime. These are experimental group exhibits that magically appear in cruddy, old industrial sites, places for which the curator swaps a laborious clean-up for some free rent. Voilà, we have a place where contemporary art of every sort can have its day in the sun (or shall we say under a flood lamp attached to a very long extension cord?).

Under these conditions, even the frailest experiment takes on a kind of courageous whimsy. The setting is half of it. In huge brick-and-timber industrial spaces, with gap-toothed planks imbedded with ancient dust under foot, a brittle little pile of what looks like brown wheat crackers in one corner takes on intriguing incongruity. Especially since you just watched the artist move it from one room to the other and pour it against the wall, kicking the pile into just the right degree of insouciant disarray with her foot. "Dirt Poems" is the title of this work by

Liz Sweibel, a collection of paper squares, each inscribed with a line or two of dirt and waxed into solidity.

Sweibel's other piece in the show, "Disappearing Acts," is also a cluster of related objects, this one comprised of floating columns of delicate wire disks, skinned over with latex like fleshy Shrinky Dinks. Linked together with thread, one above the other like smoke rings, they occupy their huge room as wistfully as spiders' dreams or laundered nylon stockings. Where the "Poems" fall weighty upon the floor—their kick a negotiation between meaning and substance—these are bodiless, immaterial gossamer. Poetry, surely, in a room that smells of dust.

Paul Clabby, too, knows how to inhabit a room with bits of nothing. His collection of plastic bags, inflated and drawn with black magic markers, scale a brick wall at least 18 feet high like wacky giant bugs puffed up with themselves and pointy at the corners. Each one is detailed with dots or squiggles or a staggered grid of brick pattern but never pretends to be anything but what it is—a thing made of transparent plastic and drawn in indelible marker.

The spirit of this exhibit is half serendipity, a bit of artistic fabrication dressed out into a found space, such as Colleen Coleman's little installation in a windowed inner office made to a makeshift stage. A tin bathtub resides in the center of the space, fenced off by

a gauzy scrim. Shards of broken mirror, a few peacock feathers, a bird's nest, a lady's fan and a spiraling symbol written in baby powder litter the floor. Tiny bells and tendrils of hair dangle on long threads from the ceiling.

Yet the act of looking is actually more revealing than all this "stuff." We are made to peer in through a broken window pane and through a creased sheer drape, and

thereby forced to assume a stance of wondering even as we *are* wondering what the hell is going on in there.

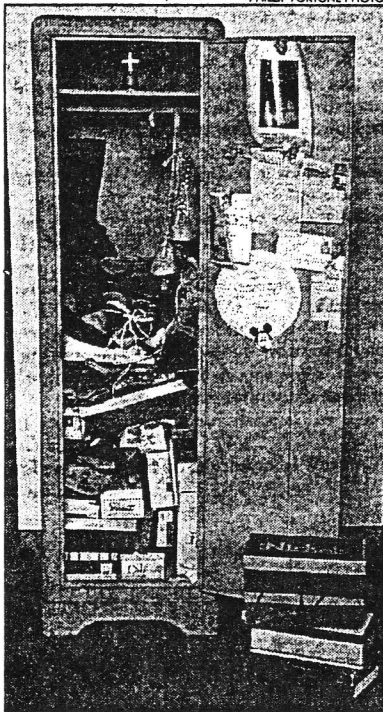
Likewise, in room after room, we stumble on to weird and staged forms. Foseph Fucigna's chains of silky white globes—part onion, part garlic, part milkweed strands—link braided arms and hoist each other vertically among the ambulatory guests. Zbigniew Grzyb's huge elephant-hide canvasses loom like deadened color television screens against the wall, their color (green, yellow, blue, red, violet) too flat and too dynamic, killing their texture while the paucity of the available light sucks them into ghosts. Less here, might have been more, the oatmeal/cement brilliance of neutrality (without saturated hue) a fitter foil for this vacuous, deadening space.

Sandra Guze knows how to set a stage: an empty wedding dress, pristine and pearly, slumps prettily in a chair. Across a table, her "partner," a billiards cue stick and its rake, leans slightly towards her, as if

in conversation. The table, gapping at the center like a lap, is set with a lace cloth that sags from the weight of a cue ball. Overhead a long wire, like an elevated train between dress and sticks, keeps score with a chain of numbered wooden "vertebrae." What does it mean? In this dry, long-abandoned space, it means shiny hopes and fate and chance assembled, perhaps, like this exhibition in a town with precious few venues to play it out. It is about a game, about fabricated personas, about newness and oldness and attitude.

This is a show, in short, about showing and, too, about showing up, and taking a shot. It is the best we have just now for "experimental" forms, with Real Art Ways in renovation and ARTSPACE in New Haven closed for good. It's a reminder that even if Hartford is a long way from New York, there are people here determined not to die of boredom. For a viewer, it is a chance to see how it is to play with time and space—for free, mind you. Nobody's making money off this or getting famous. It's a chance to remember just what play was like, when we were the ones in freckles who wanted to put on a show for the hell of it.

DD-MM-YY, an exhibition of contemporary art curated by David Borawski, at 50 Bartholomew Street, Hartford. Viewing hours: noon to 5 p.m. on Saturdays through Feb. 20; Sundays by appointment. Call 568-8191. ■



Biographical installation  
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