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A DAILY REVIEW OF THE DALLAS ARTS

Art On Display: The Neiman Marcus Windows

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Dallas is a retail town, and it is a town preoccupied with style. The confluence of these two characteristics has led to the establishment of this city as a cultural center (“where the east ends”) and a place where culture is traded, exchanged, and invested in like any other commodity.

It’s that background that charges the inspired collaborative exhibition that currently takes up the windows of the Neiman Marcus building in downtown Dallas. Organized by the Dallas Art Fair, the exhibition brings together a collection of artists and galleries as chosen by a number curators and artists. The idea for the project came out of conversations between Art Fair Founder Chris Byrne and artist Richard Patterson, and it is an inspired, witty, and playful exhibition, both approachable and refreshingly serious for public work in Dallas.



Bill Davenport's window

Along Main St., Houston artist Bill Davenport and Waxahachie’s Webb Gallery present window installations that play off the idea of the retail setting. Davenport clogs the storefront with a great variety of inspired junk he has collected from garage sales and Houston streets: magazines, knick knacks, amateur paintings, balls of yarn, novelties, toys, and all sorts of odd items. Along the window sill, a collection of Masterlocks, most opened, keys presumably lost forever. There’s momentary novelty to many of the individual objects, but the real charm in Davenport’s

installation, which is a reinstallation of an exhibition that originally took place at Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, comes from the ironic repositioning of the items. Placed in a Neiman's storefront, this stuff is both out of place and in its element – it is like Rudolph's Island of Lost Toys, forgotten neverminds made precious. The great bounty and peculiarity of the objects don't fail to spark the lingering curiosity of the passerby.



Webb Gallery's window

Webb Gallery's window display contains a similar tongue-in-cheek contextual self-consciousness but without Davenport's sense of irony. What we have here are found treasures – from works of outsider art to recovered garbs from early 20th century fraternal association rituals to stuffed animals. Webb's space reads like an archeological exhibition of the near past – or perhaps the cultural subconscious (and in particular the culture of Texas and the American South) –

eccentric and erratic objects that pack powerful allure and plenty of fresh inspiration.



Sour Grapes' window

Rounding the corner, Oak Cliff graffiti collective Sour Grapes (chosen by Dallas Contemporary Director Peter Doroshenko) installed a vibrant wall mural – complete with their trademark grinning, teethed popsicle monster. Just seeing graffiti sprayed and displayed in Neiman Marcus is enough to make any street wanderer smile, but in light of the recent Banksy bombing in Los Angeles – and the CBS Corporation's subsequent repossessing of a highway side billboard sign containing Banksy graffiti – the graffiti-in-the-store-window trick possesses an extra wry, anti-consumerist smirk. And like Sour

Grapes current indoor exhibition at the Contemporary, placing graffiti in an off-the-street context where it won't be passed by, painted over, or "whipped out" forces the viewer to recognize the vibrant energy in Sour Grapes' work, its sense of freedom and its confrontational swagger.

Down S. Ervay St. the art has a polished gallery feel. Selven O'Keef Jarmon (chosen by Toby Kamps, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, The Menil Collection) has designed a limited edition Dallas Art Fair t-shirt which adorns a stiff-backed manikin topped with an attached African head. The t-shirt also reappears on plywood squares arranged in an irregular grid with



Webb Gallery's window

the display, however, comes together more elegantly after dark, when the blue lights hidden behind the shapes give the scene a sleek glow, allowing its most interesting element, the clad manikin with its eerie, socially pungent head, to pop.

plywood rectangles bearing words referencing various intangibles – sound, music, motion, light, sight – seemingly forming sentences in some cases: “sound makes music.” There is a simple craftsmanship to this display which echoes something of Donald Judd but is also easily mistaken for a DIY meets Urban Outfitters aesthetic (perhaps out of a storefront these associations wouldn’t be so ready). During the day, the window scene felt flat – it feels either unattainably cerebral or born of subjective associations, while also clumsily overt: the text referencing amorphous constructs that subtitle the rarified t-shirt. The geometric composition of

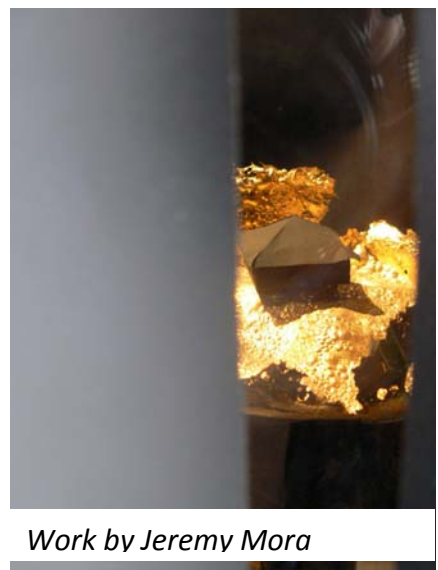


Ed Marquand's window

frustrating only because it is so loud and sexy, while standing-in for the bookstore Dallas may never know.

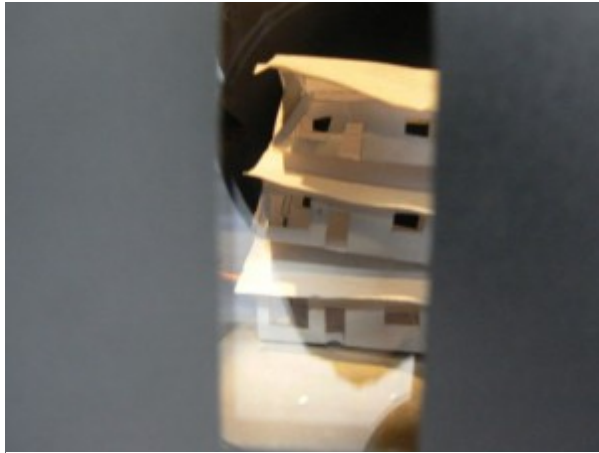
One disappointment is that the video piece by Edward Sentina was not turned on both times I visited the windows, once in the late afternoon and a second time at night. I’m not sure when the projector, which seems positioned to project an image against a frosted square of glass, is supposed be turned on (there’s no schedule posted). Or maybe I’m not thinking ‘meta’ enough, and the expectation of a video is the point (not likely considering in this Q&A, Sentina describes his video). Speaking of can’t-haves, the display by Marquand Books Owner and Creative Director Ed Marquand is

The peep show piece by Jeremy Mora (chosen by Stephen Ross, Curator of Education, Nasher Sculpture Center), pushes the concept of storefront art further still, using it as a way to reinterpret the relationship between the art viewer and the art object. Mora blacks-out his window, leaving a few dozen tiny slits at various heights, forcing the viewer to squat or stretch to peak in. What he or she finds are the tiniest sculptural treasures, precious little organic forms that sometimes hold paper houses, glittering butterflies, or biomorphic, Dr. Seuss-like cliff forms. Mora’s piece is a cocoon of sorts, holding and nurturing the life of the art “Things are going to change” is



Work by Jeremy Mora

printed on one of the tiny sculptures – perhaps apocalyptically calling attention to the temporality of the exhibition as a whole. There is a tension between the playful and precious, precarious and catastrophic that runs through this work.



Work by Jeremy Mora

By forcing us to do a kind of street dance to see the work inside – up, down, moving about – Mora amplifies the preciousness of the objects while calling attention to effort involved in viewing. Mora is ingeniously playing with “display,” and yet there is nothing tongue-in-cheek here. Rather, the artist embraces the role of art object as eye candy. It is okay if we look at art like we would clothes or jewelry in a

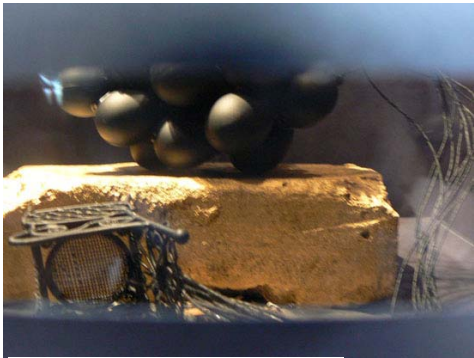
fancy department store window; the difference is in what we find. For Mora’s little allegorical world, having the objects is not as important as discovering them. We don’t need to consume or adorn ourselves with the beautiful things in these windows for our appetites to be satiated. We just need to look.



Bill Davenport Window



Bill Davenport Window



Work by Jeremy Mora



Work by Jeremy Mora



Work by Jeremy Mora



Main image: Window by Selven O'Keef Jarmon