

The Daily Camera

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: http://www.dailycamera.com/bdc/art_galleries/article/0,1713,BDC_2460_2037456,00.html

Selection process makes interesting Biennial at MCA

By J. Gluckstern, Camera Visual Arts Critic
June 15, 2003

One of the things that makes an art scene interesting and vibrant is that it's big enough and eclectic enough so that no one institution or group of artists holds sway over its development. Further, when some sort of periodic evaluation of its current merits rolls around, some effort is made to cast a wide enough, but still rigorous net when selecting the artists meant to represent that scene.

Though some will — and necessarily should — argue what its relative merits might be, Colorado's art scene certainly has arrived at interesting. And with the "2003 Colorado Biennial: 10+10," now on display at the Museum of Contemporary Art/Denver, the multiple perspectives that contribute to the vibrancy of Colorado's contemporary art and artists have been folded right into the curation process.

To start things off, MCA director Cydney Payton selected 10 artists (from about 460 proposals); then, each of those artists invited one other artist to be in the show. The theory turns on a certain degree of trust between curator and artist, a nod toward not just the artists' work but their aesthetic judgment of others' work as well. And in practice, that license to choose has helped the exhibition strike the right balance between innovation and influence, as Payton's generally emerging, cutting-edge choices tended to pick more established artists.

The resulting mix is as familiar as it is forward-looking, showcasing the recent accomplishments of 20 of the state's more provocative artists and hinting at what their — and our — futures might hold.

For the most part, the layout of the show pairs each artist Payton picked with that artist's selection, with some care taken to suggest formal connections between them. For instance, as something of an introduction to the exhibition, a series of 10 blobbish, metallically glazed earthenware sculptures by Jeff Starr (an artist chosen by Payton) are arranged in a cozy entry alcove with two works by Colin Livingston (picked by Starr) — "It's Gonna Be OK" and "Collect Them All," pop-art and -culture inspired creations of paint, tape, vinyl lettering and oil bar on particle board — hanging on a wall just to the right. Both artists playfully explore the gap between rough process and glitzy product, and Payton's close clustering of the work brings out that shared sensibility.

Ditto with Payton pick Chris Lavery, whose hilarious installation "It's Good to Get Out" — in which six freshly chopped pine trees are suspended from the ceiling, bathed in fluorescent light and serenaded by a cacophonous ambient sound loop of barking dogs — plays well off Lavery's selection, Justin Cooper. Cooper's "I'm Secretly in Love With Everybody" is another installation piece concerned with the vagaries of constructed experience, this one featuring a real pineapple jabbed onto the end of a multi-colored wooden plank hung from the ceiling with a garden hose.

These connections build and proliferate as the exhibition progresses. There are conventional pairings — of appropriately sublime abstract works by Wilma Fiori and her pick, Emilio Lobato; of meditations on character, narrative and presentation as seen in the way Payton selection Quintin Gonzalez's blurred, multiple exposure digital images butt up against the quiet desperation of John Hull's candid vignettes; and of the doubly visceral punches of Michelle Gonzalez's tortured sculptural pieces and her chosen complement, a series of sculptures by Martha Russo that seem to evoke the flesh itself.

But there also are selections that beg larger or more personal connections. One unorthodox Payton pick is the Denver artist collective Ilk, which, in turn, decided to open its high-profile "space" in the Biennial — currently occupied by an endless "lease agreement" and a "For Rent" sign tacked to the walls of a remote alcove — to an undetermined number of other artists during the course of the exhibition. On a more intimate front, Daniel Raffin's installation piece — "Parabola Affirmed," which juxtaposes a fuzzy video projection with three propellers whirring inches above a sea of green plastic buttons on the blue-painted floor of MCA's cafe space — literally surrounds the smartly self-referential photo work of his chosen artist, his wife, Monica Escalante.

Other pairings hold together through a mutual inclination to push and critique conventional genre boundaries. Patricia Tinajero-Baker does so with "virga," an installation of dozens of suspended yarn gewgaws and seemingly unfinished patterns of paint on the walls and floor at the bottom of the stairs to the mezzanine gallery. Her choice, Bob Koons, checks in with several paintings from his "Fake!" series, which are based on barely discernible digital scans of famous historical works by artists such as Albert Bierstadt, Claude Lorraine and Joseph Mallord William Turner.

Kwabena Slaughter's video projection "The Poetry of Facts" — a sort of meditation on stasis and dynamism — becomes but one of the objects reflected by a mirrored work created by Slaughter's pick, Blair Brown.

Pirate Gallery founder and renowned found-object manipulator Phil Bender makes an appearance, too, with a claw-footed bathtub full of Christmas tree ornaments, while the artist who chose him, David Brady, one of Denver's youngest art stars and a longtime favorite of Payton, takes the discussion, quite literally, outside: His piece, titled "Inside-out," consists of a number of tiny live microphones placed

throughout the gallery spaces that pipe sounds to an array of speakers mounted just outside the museum.

In a way, one of Brady's basic ideas — that what's said in the presence of "10+10" somehow ought to be heard beyond its confines — is a metaphor for any larger discussion of the exhibition as a whole. At the very least, it will keep things interesting.

Contact J. Gluckstern at (303) 473-1397 or glucksternj@dailycamera.com.

Copyright 2003, The Daily Camera. All Rights Reserved.