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Voelz Chandler: 'Lux' looms large at gallery

July 11, 2003



Mary Voelz
Chandler

An art venue filled with installations is not that unusual. An art venue that becomes the installation, though, is a treat, and that's the lingering effect of "Ambient Lux," at Carson Masuoka Gallery.

Large sculptural pieces fill each wall or are suspended from the ceiling, and although "large" is the operative word here, the gallery feels more spacious than ever. Perhaps it is because several of these pieces are all-encompassing, complex and complicated constructions with a point of view.

A woven and painted metal curtain - New Mexico-based John Garrett's *Guatemala* - invites inspection, certainly, as do his hanging *Dancers* that seem to twirl in the front window. And Colorado resident Gwen Laine's series of totems, topped by gelatin prints of clouds, would sway, if steel were wheat.

But it's hard not to focus on pieces by Christopher Romer and Martha Russo, for the way they take advantage of material as much as for their pure adventure of assembly.

Romer, of New York, has carved more than 100 pieces from wood - some into lozenges, some more eclectic - then painted them and sanded them so the paint grows more bold toward the bottom. These *Charmers*, dotted with metal hardware and showing spots of grain, were arranged through the use of darts (gallery personnel and artist threw darts to determine which pieces would hang where). Romer has said the array of horizontal shapes reminds him of insects hanging on a screen door, attracted by the light; or they could be rain, a shower of shape and surface that is commanding in its impact.

Colorado resident Russo has employed the difficult material of porcelain to create *Nomos*, which could be a reef that drifted onto land. She formed and glazed hundreds of tentacles - some reaching out, some curling back - adding various colors at the tip. She then inserted the spikes in a board mounted on the wall. The precision, the deft handling of clay, and the subtlety of shading lift *Nomos* to a different level. It is irresistible.

Gallery director and partner Mark Masuoka remembers encountering the genesis of Russo's *Nomos* several years ago, when it was less complicated - and probably didn't fill the 70 boxes Russo hauled into the gallery for a week of construction.

But that's a curator's life, waiting months, even years, for a work or a show to come together.

That will end soon for Masuoka - at this location, anyway. As of Aug. 1, he will become executive director of the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, where Masuoka's wife, ceramist Deborah Masuoka, studied in the late 1980s. Masuoka says that the offer was floated

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(again) around the time Omaha-based ceramist Jun Kaneko installed a show here last November. The organization has gained a reputation for its exhibitions and residency program.

It marks the latest career shift for Masuoka, who became a partner with Sandy Carson in the gallery in early 2001, and attracted several solid contemporary artists. Before that, he was director, since January 2000, of the Museum of Contemporary Art/Denver. And before that, he served a short stint at Emmanuel Gallery on the Auraria Campus, a place that barely lives on in more than collective memory. In the 1990s, he was director of the Nevada Institute of Contemporary Art.

The call to Bemis was too strong, he said this week: "It was a chance to do something else. It's a great opportunity."

Ambient Lux

- What: Artwork by John Garrett, Gwen Laine, Chris Romer and Martha Russo, with "The Eclectic Goblet," glass works curated by Shane Fero
- When and where: Through Aug. 29, at Carson Masuoka Gallery, 760 Santa Fe Drive
- Information: (303) 573-8585

AS AN ALTERNATIVE: Warren Kelly, who moved to Taos after his 2002 graduation from the Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design, finds continued inspiration in the land and light. That's clear in new work up through July 20 at Pirate a Contemporary Art Oasis, 3659 Navajo St.

The paintings in "Homestead" include about a dozen small pieces related by subject matter, as well as two larger images interpreting the Matachines of New Mexico. Kelly, whose last Pirate show stretched the limits of panorama, here uses curvilinear marks to express the distortion of space. These pieces ask for study, as a viewer shifts perception to interpret subjects ranging from a meadow to a procession of true believers. Kelly calls them works in progress, in preparation for a show at Cordell Taylor Gallery this November.

Pirate has a RMCAD theme throughout. In the Treasure Chest, associate registrar Elizabeth Mahler Licence is showing dreamy Polaroid prints on watercolor paper, in "From the Side of the Road: An American Landscape." And the main gallery is an assemblage of student/staff work, "As luck would have it," selected by instructor Keely Preston (who gave up her show slot in the process). They range from the fully realized to *real* works in progress.

Information: (303) 458-6058.

TONIGHT, TONIGHT: Artists turned out in force with work for the Chicano Humanities and Arts Council's "Spirit of Frida Kahlo." Works on view through Saturday include the sympathetic, including constructions by Meggan de Anza, and the irreverent, such as Daniel Salazar's deceptively funny "ad" for a *Frida and Diego Sex Tape*. The final step in celebrating the unibrow: a Kahlo look-alike contest at 8 p.m. today. CHAC is at 772 Santa Fe Drive; information: (303) 571-0440.

And at Wheelbarrow, the subject is civil liberties, for a show advanced by a barrage of e-mails asserting that Michigan artist John Roos was not allowed to board a Denver-bound plane in Detroit to participate because security people objected to the content of his work. (Roos says the hardware on some pieces set off alarms, but that the subject matter angered the guards. Among them was a gourd painted with the words "dirty bomb," and viewable at www.roosart.com. Roos did board a later flight.) "Pro (test) America" opens at 6

today, at 3553 Brighton Blvd.; information: (720) 629-4275.

WHO'S IN THE MONEY: The "Art on Two Wheels" exhibition made about \$15,000 for the Cherry Creek Arts Festival last weekend. About 10,000 people visited the tent housing highly detailed motorcycles as well as spottily labeled work by five artists. No hard numbers exist yet on art sales overall for the 2003 event.

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