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Sesow at Artomatic 2007

Selected by jury at Creative Partner's Gallery
January 2007
Bethesda, MD









photos by Mike Olliver: (pictures from January 20 "Artist's Talk")













January 9, 2006 through **February 3, 2007**

Artomatic at Creative Partners

and New Work by Gallery Members

Creative Partners Gallery is one of the host galleries for Artomatic and will be featuring the work of six performing and visual artists participating in Artomatic:

- James Bailey, photography
- Josh Joroko, mixed media
- Craig Kraft, neon sculpture
- Michele de la Menardiere,painting
- Elizabeth Morisette, mixed media sculpture
- Matt Sesow, painting

See www.artomatic.org for further information on artists and show details.

Artomatic has linked up with ARTDC.org to create a "virtual Artomatic" web presence from which each of the participating galleries and performance venues will be able to identify and select artists for events beginning in January 2007.

Contact: AAE@artomatic.org.

Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 12PM - 6PM

Reception Friday, January 12, 6-9PM

Performing Arts Events on Saturdays, about 2 pm:

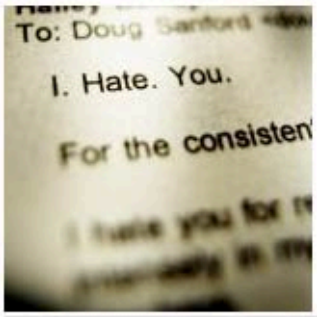
- Saturday January 13: MudPie, "freejazz" trio
- Saturday January 20: Artist talks: Matt Sesow and Elizabeth Morisette will each discuss their work.
- Saturday January 27: Wes Tucker will perform his music

Falls Church News-Press ONLINE
LOCAL NEWS. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE.

Northern Virginia Art Beat

PRINT EMAIL

By Kevin Mellema
Thursday, 18 January 2007



Art Beat

Artomatic, the biannual DC area art free-for-all, was scheduled to appear late last year. Unable to find a suitable venue, Artomatic 2006 didn't happen. In its place, all artists on the www.Artomatic.org email list were invited to post images on www.artdc.org, from which four galleries in the Bethesda arts district would pick artists to show in a "Best of Artomatic" event. This sort of thing happens all over town after Artomatic runs its course, and reason enough to participate in the event Washington Post art critic Blake Gopnik likened to a convention of amateur dentistry, in his infamous 2004 review. In a town traditionally known for dead safe art, anything that offensive can't be all bad. Attendance soared after Gopnik's hack job. That was 2004, what will we find in 2007?

The standout at Fraser Gallery is Doug Sanford's six black and white photos of emails (printed out on paper) purportedly from a jilted girlfriend. Sanford has adroitly zeroed in on key passages by limiting the focal plane down to a single line of text, assumedly through the use of a 4x5 camera. They're artful photos shot with dappled light. It would be difficult to improve on Sanford's work. These are fabulous. You take one look at these images and you can't help but laugh at the overwrought, single minded blind rage of the author. Schadenfreude as the Germans say.

If Sanford's ex-girlfriend were in striking range this would be a scissors wielding nightmare. Shirts, pants, sports and stereo equipment would all be defenestrated post haste. His visage would be chopped out of dozens of photos. However the implied distance between the two parties in this case allows us to relax about it, and have a good chuckle at her expense. The best, and dare one say most poignant, is the photo titled "I. Hate. You." She of course expounds on Doug's many faults in the other images, but this one seems to sum it all up. Stay. Away. Doug.

I'm tempted to say that of all the Artomatic offerings this would be the one I could live with. But over time the joke may wear thin, and the significant negative energy about it would surely wear through eventually. Then again, if you're prone to over the top displays like this, it might be a good reminder to have around to help you even out those emotional peaks and valleys. Either way it's great work, and a lot of fun. Thanks for sharing Doug.

Creative Partners Gallery provided a corner of it's gallery to Artomatic artists. Notably we see Matt Sesow and Denver, Colorado based Joroko. Joroko's anti-war assemblages on canvas would give you the most artistic bang for your buck. Hopefully not literally, as several do have bullets attached.

Burned holes in the canvases seem to be pathways for spent projectiles of some sort. The assorted objects attached aren't all identifiable, but we know that man's great capacity in doing ill will to his fellow man will find diabolically creative and horrible uses for them. It's serious work, and well done. The problem here is political art of this sort comes with an expiration date. The moment the US pulls out of Iraq, this stuff is so much soured milk. Ironically the pro-war propaganda that wars inevitably generate never seems to go out of style, it simply takes on a somewhat campy patina over time.

Artomatic is essentially a vehicle to get exposure for new, and hopefully worthy, talent that otherwise would have a difficult time getting seen. Matt Sesow is starting to remind me of the kids who go Trick or Treating for a few too many years. But I can't fault Matt too much, he's out there hustling. Hardly new, or emerging, Sesow recently estimated his sold works at roughly 2,000. Anybody questioning this factoid can check out his web site www.sesow.com, I'd dare say they may all be on view right there. It's the most mind boggling artist website I've ever seen. The guy is certainly prolific. He had a wonderful cow painting posted on artdc.org, but that sold long before the Artomatic picks were made. Like most artists working in a mature style, some of his works feel formulaic, but when he's good, his brutalist work is spot on. I have one, doesn't everybody?

With a couple of exceptions, the artists at Washington School of Photography seemed to need more time in the incubator before emerging. This was Gopnik's main problem with Artomatic to begin with. It goes with the territory. Raymond Rozycki, a graphic artist with the FBI in the daytime, is hardly young but rarely shows his work, so it's new to most people. One of many excellent artists who attend the Tuesday night open figure drawing sessions at McLean Community Center, Ray does strong punchy figure drawings with compressed charcoal. It's good to see his work on the wall. Additionally, Joseph Virgillo has a series of eight black and white photos. A couple of which mimic the absurdly bold sexuality of Helmut Newton's work. My favorite titled "Lipstick," is more along the lines of Erwin Blumenfeld's work for Vogue in the 1950s. Here we have a slightly shaky cam image of a beautiful brunette about to apply her lipstick. It has such a genuinely natural look about it, it seems almost voyeuristic.

Neptune Gallery seems to have done the best job of selecting young, vibrant talent on the cusp of something bigger. Cherie Lester has 22 small paper collages on canvas. These assemblages have a definite 50's feel to them, often using tiny line drawings that look like they were cut from the flaps of dress pattern packaging. Over and over again we're presented with almond shaped ellipses, many bifurcated with a single vertical line. Clearly she wants to tell us something about women, exactly what her message is though is going past me. The 50s were an odd time for women. After the testosterone laden 40s, the 50s was about as estrogen infused a decade as you can get. It's the only time Detroit painted cars variations of pink on regular basis. Family life was the order of the day. The downside was that women who had been called to do man's work during the war, were now expected to resume the woman's role. It took a while for that pot to boil over, but we all know how that story turned out, so it's an odd period to reference in such a way as Cherie does. In any event the collages look cool, but I think they might benefit from a wash of varnish, or acrylic medium to finish them off. They feel more like works in progress in this raw unprotected state.

The best of show may in fact be the tiny tableau buildings of Baltimore Based artist Mars Tokyo (a.k.a. Sally Mericle). Here we see surrealistic tableaus of alienation and disorientation, among other things. One of my favorites is 'Teatro Della Stia Di Gallina'. This one features, by scale, a giant chicken coup with roosting hens on raised platforms, with droppings spattering the floor beneath them. Amidst this filth is a tiny stocky woman we imagine as the cleaning woman. Walking out, bags in hand, she's had enough of this scene. Mars Tokyo works some sort of magical visual voodoo that gives these tableaus a seemingly impossible depth of field. They seem very real for plastic objects so obscenely small. It's great work. She also has photos of the sculptures which, to my eye, don't quite capture the magic of the original sculptures. Check out her website teenytheaters.com

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'Minimatic': Artomatic comes to Bethesda

Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2007

On View
Claudia Rousseau

Artomatic, the enormous art free-for-all that has been a Washington, D.C., phenomenon since 1999, simply failed to happen last fall. The grand venue needed for an exhibit that might have included as many as 800 visual artists and more than 200 performance artists of various kinds never materialized. In an effort to save the day, organizers decided to create a ''Minimatic" — that is, an online Artomatic with miniature images posted by artists working in various media. Far fewer artists participated in the Artdc.org posting than in Artomatic 2004, the last actual event that took place in the vast spaces of the former Children's Museum downtown. Overall, the quality seemed lower, too.

Nevertheless, four Bethesda galleries had already committed to exhibit their ''Artomatic Picks" long before the failed show last November. Pushed forward by Catriona Fraser, these exhibits are now on view in her own Fraser Gallery, Gallery Neptune, Creative Partners Gallery and the Washington Gallery of Photography, with artists selected from the online site, and with associated performances scheduled at these galleries and other Bethesda venues. Although it isn't the Artomatic we have all come to love, it is certainly a lesson in what happens when gallerists are asked to choose from such a huge menu. The best tend to rise to the top, like cream in unhomogenized milk, to the point that duplicate picks had to be sorted out, and names familiar from previous exhibits turned up again, although some with new work. On the other hand, all the work is not great; some real bloopers are on view — just enough, perhaps, to give these exhibits a feel of the real Artomatic circus.

Scrupulously avoiding artists she has represented, Fraser's selections form the most interesting group, with high-quality work that comfortably blends together into an almost thematic presentation. Works here generally refer to male/female relationships, identity and memory.

Tiik Pollet's exquisitely and technically perfect large black-and-white gelatin silver prints of transgendered women (from her series ''Girls will be Boys") stand out among all the photographic efforts in the exhibit. These deeply felt, indelible images are somehow raw, exposing a vulnerability the artist finds a way to convey with both sympathy and objectivity. This sensibility is especially poignant in ''Garage Door," a photo that beckons the viewer into a largely unknown world. Things aren't what they seem.

Doug Sanford's sepia-toned series of large-scale photographs of selected e-mail texts is similar. At first sight, you think of old texts. On closer observation, their sad and angry content (the aftermath of a failed relationship) leaps out, changing the character of memory into something simultaneously aggressive and painful.

Mary Beth Ramsey, who was everybody's pick in 2004 for her hyper-realistic pastel drawings of fruit, appears with an exciting new body of work, also dealing with memory and time. Box-like collages with old photos, title pages, drawings and objects collected from the detritus found in an old family cabin are handled with the same meticulous sense of detail that made her pastels so impressive.

Also compelling, in a similar vein, are Kim Bentley's small collaged works and Rion Hoffmann's sculpture with layered Polaroid transfers on little glass panels, lit from behind in found-wood boxes.

Of the three artists at Gallery Neptune, the hottest pick is Mars Tokyo, an odd pseudonym for a sensitive artist whose work has little to do with outer space or Japan. Instead, they have much to do with the tradition of toy theaters, tiny worlds made of Italian marbled papers and playing cards, full of fascination and surreal commentary. Exhibited in a wonderfully baroque painted wood case, the theaters have Italian names that conjure memories of a lost world of romance. A few color photos of the interiors, blown-up many times, accompany the ''teeny theaters.'' The best of these is the image from ''Teatro della Louise,'' that is, silent film star Louise Brooks.

James W. Bailey's ''Condo Noir'' at Creative Partners is part of a photo essay (accompanied by a precisely written text) on race and class in the imagery of suburban development. The artist's ''rough edge photography'' process, which involves burning and other destructive procedures that alter the appearance of the photos, brings in elements of time, decay and loss. His is certainly this show's most interesting work.

Matt Sesow's ''art brut'' paintings are unusually strident, their rawness given a new level of discomfort by allusions to soldiers and terror — possibly to the tragedy in Darfur. Similarly, the narrative sense in Ed Bisese's ''A Problem Solved'' at Neptune makes it the most compelling work I've seen by this artist in some time.

Craig Kraft's neon tubing is probably more inspiring on the architectural scale of his public work in Silver Spring, and Josh Joroko's politically inspired assemblages are somewhat less visually intense than the artist would seem to intend.

washingtonpost.com

GOING OUT GURUS

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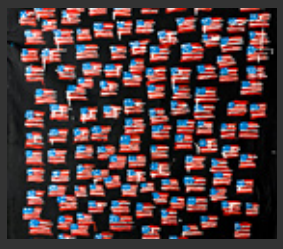
Collages, Sculptures and Pictures of 'Marilyn'

Lovers of the visual arts will be busy this weekend. Galleries in Bethesda and Logan Circle open their doors for coordinated receptions on Friday and Saturday nights showing off a ton of local talent. Want to check them out? Read on for interactive maps of the areas and tidbits about some of the artwork on display.

Artomatic may not have risen again completely, but small gallery shows in Bethesda this month bring back much of the free-for-all spirit. Several galleries along the Bethesda Art Walk from 6-9 p.m. on Friday night show off works by artists who were selected from an open pool organized by Artomatic. Matt Sesow's work -- which our colleague Lavanya Ramanathan called "Basquiat-esque" not too long ago -- will be on view at Creative Partners Gallery along with the work of five other artists.

I'm also looking forward to the exhibit at Gallery Neptune, featuring the work of Ed Biese, Mars Tokyo and Cherie Lester. Biese's almost cartoonish figures are compelling in their grotesqueness. His work, alongside visionary artist Tokyo and photographer and collage artist Lester should be a very diverse show. (And if you have time to come back to Bethesda on Saturday afternoon, the 4traits performance at Neptune is worth checking out.)

This interactive map can help you get around all the participating Artomatic galleries. The Bethesda Urban Partnership's map can help those looking for a more comprehensive night of gallery-hopping.



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