

A R T R E D U X

Floor 4 Gallery

Since opening last February with the group show *All The Young Dudes/The Big Pink Show*, Floor 4 Gallery has proven itself to be an intriguing and inviting space to see new art by, so far, recent graduates from the Kansas City Art Institute. In May, *The Last Show What's the Big Idea?* featured the work of the two "artists in residence" at the space, David Sindelar and Matthew Wood, a.k.a., Woody, augmented a sound installation by Chris Willis on the night of the opening.

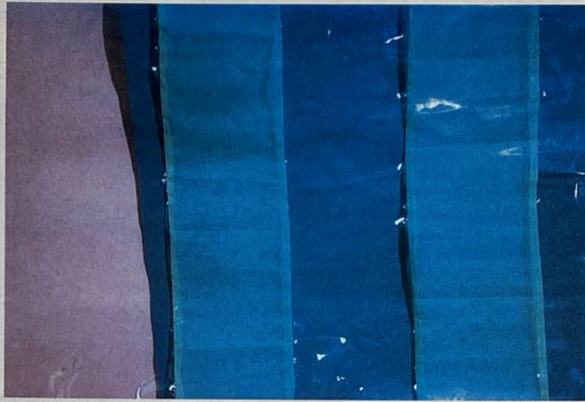
Both Sindelar and Wood studied in the painting department, graduating with BFAs in May. Their works reflect an increasingly open attitude toward departmental classifications, each challenging traditions of painting by pushing materials, presentation and technique. The pairing of the work is a good match that creates a complementary dynamic despite different approaches and aesthetics.

Sindelar's compositions are fascinatingly sculptural, created with components including individually shaped wood elements covered in plush black velvet, coiling silver springs, fishing hooks, colorful lures and rubber bands. Installed on large white walls (save three ceiling-hung sculptures called *Balls to the Walls*), the pieces relate and react to the space. Individual character and whimsy are seen in a grouping of small pieces called *Velvet Revolution*, seeming almost precious in comparison to the larger installations that cover entire walls.

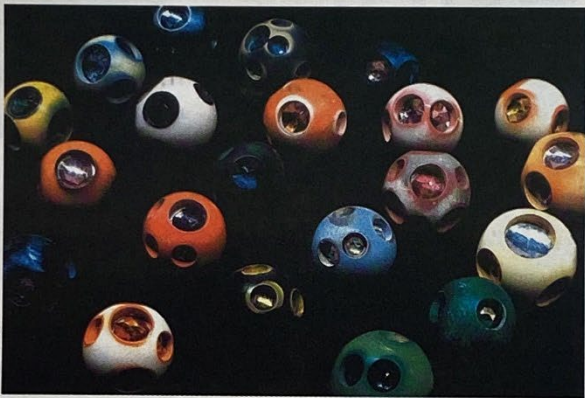
Family Tree, for example, connects delicate and organically shaped velvet forms with silver springs and hooks. Bringing to mind aesthetics of a cosmos, the biomorphic forms are independently beautiful with interdependent harmonious tension. Also humorous and sly, *Family Tree* resonates a distinctive "spat," arranged as if Sindelar threw a ball of paint against the wall. Another work, *AV-52*, is installed vertically, with multicolored rubber bands stretched between and attached to two adjacent groups of velvet forms, spanning approximately three feet. Despite the playfulness, an underlying seriousness teases the senses but alludes to precise distinctions; relationships with ecology, astronomy and biology are conceivable, but unconfirmed.

Wood's subtle, magnetic paintings balance Sindelar's sizable installations. The paintings are slick and somewhat graphic in appearance and content, with highly polished, deep wax surfaces. Beneath their nebulosic veneers are angular schematic forms of often pale color, countered with small, bright colored grid areas. Like a legend on a map, they appear off center, often in the lower edges, outside of the main composition. The compositions are inspired by airport terminal diagrams, with titles like *JFK*, *Midway*, *Denver*.

Some of the larger (and new) paintings (*Miami*, *San Francisco* and *San Juan*) are shaped and lean against rather than hang on the wall. These works approach sculpture with glowing grounds of peachy-pink. Other smaller canvases are no less interesting though, such as *Niagara*, a stunning piece with a cool green ground and a brown, black and blue grid. Though recognizable as paintings, the works are mixed-media collages that challenge the viewer to identi-



Constant Chameleon (detail), 2000, vinyl and polyester, Rachel Hayes.



Lucky Balls, 1999, wood balls, acrylic gems, Krylon, John Torreano.

fy a brush stroke. During my visit, Wood talked about his exercise in "taking the hand out of painting" and challenging traditions associated with the making and installation of painting. *The Last Show* identified two very different artists addressing individual issues, but whose works commingled in a beneficial dialogue.

Grand Arts

Larry Buechel's recent show, *Eye To Eye*, through June 3 at Grand Arts, features work true to its title: a lot of probing eyes. Buechel earned his BFA with an emphasis in sculpture from Kansas City Art Institute in 1986, continuing with an MFA in sculpture from University of Delaware, Newark, in 1994. He is currently Studio and Technical Director at Grand Arts. In this installation, Buechel turns the tables on the viewer by altering the gallery experience to one where instead of a visual feast of art, the viewer is made

to feel consumed by a tyrannical eye, which happens to be his.

This point is immediately made in a huge digital painting depicting an extreme close-up of Buechel's eye titled *Eye Contact*, measuring 10' x 15'. Situated as a sort of wall, the painting controls the space by acting as a barrier, blocking off part of the gallery. Its imposing nature repels with a cold frontality. Also decorating billboards outside of Grand Arts and downtown, the large eye is impersonal and chilling, devoid of the context of a face or personality.

Observatory is a kinetic work in the front of the gallery, with four t.v. monitors spinning on top of a tall black four-legged base. The dizzying piece features the same eye, blinking and expressionless on each monitor. The piece is unsettling, both conceptually and physically obviously referencing surveillance and the inability to escape the ever-

moving, tireless eye. The spinning monitors are also hard to view for too long without becoming nauseated. Smacking of a sci-fi creation, the motorized contraption resembles a futuristic mechanical beast, capable of chasing down those who step out of line.

More whimsical is a small moving monitor atop a yellow tripod used for land surveying, perhaps intended as a pun. The monitor features the same eye, only this time it can follow the visitors via a remote control operated by another person in the gallery. Entitled *Hello*, the piece is friendlier and more about interaction and play than confrontational control. On par with *Hello* was *Kaleidoscope*, a video viewed through a hole in the wall. Using a favorite manipulation of perspective, the small hole revealed a variegated, surrounding collage of the eye, blinking and pulsating.

Encore is perhaps the most interesting sculpture in the show, and also very clinical. Six sculptures comprise the piece, each on a shiny metal low square base, with long shiny dowels sprouting in regular rows of graduating heights. Mounted on top of the dowels are small black vertical bases with several attachments: a magnifying glass on each, amplifying a prosthetic eye with a bright red archer's bow-sight, centered and poking towards the viewer's own eye. The imagined effect evokes a glaucoma test (or worse), where the patient must focus while a pulse of air is blown against the eye.

Each piece at some level encroaches on the viewers' space and perceptions in an intrusive, off-putting manner. The works' combativeness could be considered their strongest aspect, but it is uncomfortable, an aesthetic based on anxiety. In the presence of the work, the affect is acute. But once physically removed, its lasting power is negligible.

Joseph Nease Gallery

Three separate shows at Joseph Nease close Saturday, June 3, James Brinsfield: *Post Abstraction*; John Torreano: *Installation (Lucky Balls)* and Rachel Hayes: *Constant Chameleon*, are uniquely engaging as well as mutually enhancing. The strong connective threads binding the works are not surprising considering the relationships among the artists. Brinsfield was a student of John Torreano, Hayes a student of Brinsfield. But rather than being derivative, the distinctive works radiate a spontaneity and joy.

Torreano, most well known of the group, is director of the MA studio art program at New York University, with many exhibitions nationally and internationally under his belt. Despite this, his *Lucky Balls*, though delightful, are faint in comparison with Brinsfield's dynamic paintings and Hayes's spectacular installation in the rear of the gallery. The 19 *Lucky Balls* are about the same size as a pool balls. They are all different with nuances of bright colors, crafted from wood with round hollows that reveal faceted interiors of multicolored acrylic gems. The bright balls are entic-

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ing and semiprecious, like costume jewelry found in plastic bubbles from gum machines.

Brinsfield, a 1997 Charlotte Street Fund award recipient and lecturer in the painting, design/illustration and intermedia departments at Kansas City Art Institute, follows a spirit of experimentation in his paintings. Created from tape, paper and magic marker on canvas, his works evoke a sense of sophisticated naivety. The character of his compositions are like paintings, but, as articulated in his artist's statement, Brinsfield describes a work as "a new model of painting that evokes the complexity and beauty of painting's power to engage the viewer."

A work from 1999, *Tableau* reveals rainbow colored centipede-like strips applied between groups resembling a pile-up of vehicles on a highway. These clumped forms are colored with blue and black outlines countering the rainbow like meandering strips, the elements over a grid of unevenly applied squares of paper, some warped and wrinkled. The reference to vehicles is furthered in *Contact Patch* (1999) with similarly clumped elements in the upper portion, and three large collaged tires below. Creased tape and wrinkled edges add a "carelessness" to the compositions which are also tense and slightly manic, albeit cheerful.

Brinsfield's new paintings appear more polished, veering to lyrical, music-based relationships. The paintings reveal their harmonic themes through titles such as *Overdub*, *Soundscape* and *Four Seconds Spinning*, the last referring to the first four seconds of a song by the Charlie Parker Quintet. Curvilinear forms and words spelling musical instruments in a painting titled *Blue Milk* (2000) lend a graphic quality while concurrently interjecting more organic forms. Brinsfield's intention to depict sound through vision warrants a nod to Kandinsky, but his work remains autonomous in their experimental nature, exhibiting a flow and growth.

Rachel Hayes rounds out the exhibition with her buoyant installation, *Constant Chameleon*, in the back of the gallery. The piece (comprising three parts: the wall, a post and the floor) is composed of colorful pieces of polyester, varying in size and sewn together. The fabric is covered and transformed by a curtain of transparent, tinted vinyl. Hayes graduated from the Art Institute last year, where she studied in the fiber department, as well as under Brinsfield. Hayes's work, touched with a paradoxical whimsy, finds kindred spirits in her fellow exhibiting artists.

The largest section covers two walls and a corner with floor to ceiling. Peaches, oranges, rich reds, yellows, purples and fuschias glimmer from the layers, the colors seeming to float between them rather than belonging to either. The vinyl is interspersed with horizontal stripes of cream sheer, providing a touch of opacity. Light dappling from creases in the vinyl flicker brightly in a counterbalance.

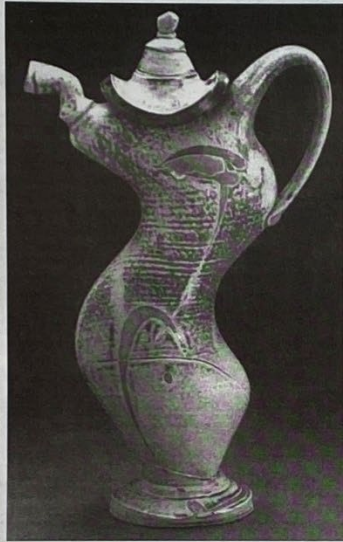
Hanging from a central post is a similarly colored fabrication, mixing sections of loosely hanging polyester with areas of vinyl. The work is fresh and light,

revealing a laborious attention to craft and detail. The floor piece, covered in vinyl with pockets of air showing below the surface, completes the installation.

Red Star Studios

The lively ceramic work of Nick Joerling was recently shown at Red Star Studios, and closed May 26. The show contained a variety of ceramics, platters, pitchers, dishes and compotes. All were functional, but their designs were highly manipulated, creating unusual and delightful forms.

Joerling's vessels are first wheel thrown, then manipulated with different pinching and pushing-out techniques. The forms become sinuous, referencing the figure most clearly seen in various pitchers. A spout becomes an uplifted arm, the rounded handle coquettishly bent as if a woman is dancing with her hand resting on her waist. The form is also very animated, the cover becoming an amusing little hat; seen

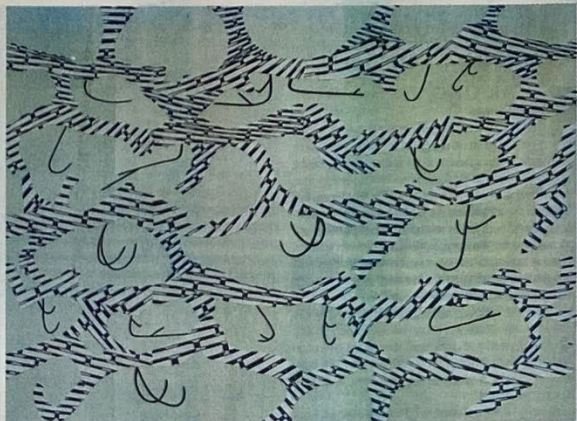


Nick Joerling at Red Star.

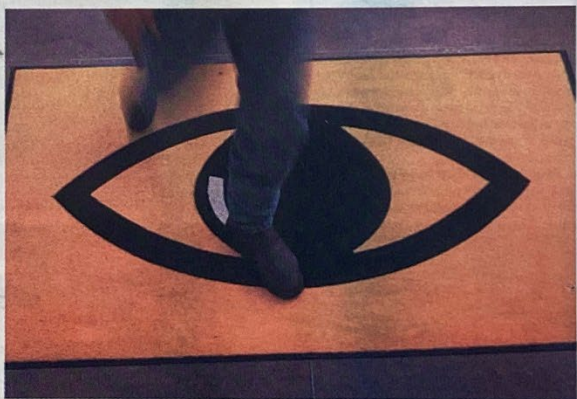
this way, the vessel seems more like a dancing mushroom from *Fantasia*.

Other pitchers resemble birds, their spouts becoming large beaks on an almost diminutive body. The glazes on a few of these pitchers accentuate the reference, with little dots of color beginning to profile an eye in the appropriate place; but this could also be a "happy accident." In an artist's statement, Joerling discusses his use of drawing in making his ceramics: "Not drawing as rendering but simply doodling, then working hard to get that drawing to function." His glazing accentuates the forms with subtlety, revealing a complexity of technique while maintaining a lightness.

In some cases Joerling used four coats of glaze, clearly seen in many of the large platters. Swirling



Four Seconds Spinning, 2000, oil, marker, tape on paper on canvas, James Brinsfield.



Palace Guard, 1999, nylon mat, Larry Buechel.

forms within a dark blue ground, for example, are sprinkled with orange and turquoise designs at the edge. The various decorative elements are textural; swirls are raised as are the glazes at the edges. The color of the glaze also changes within a given piece, becoming lighter in areas as a result of the application. Different colors reveal different layers, indicating the multiple glazing process. Using a brush technique with a Shino underglaze and a wax resist, the process is likened to sgraffito, where the ceramic body beneath the glaze is revealed.

Speckled ochres, umbers, earth greens and blue glazes often suggest landscapes, augmented by the organic forms of the vessels. Simple forms such as a set of four cups have complex glazes with dripping blue and green interiors, countered with opaque

exteriors of white and beige. The pieces are again made whimsical with the addition near the lip of a simple creature resembling a fish, its blue-green body outlined in amber with a matching eye. Other small objects, such as a pair of ochre salt and pepper shakers, delight with delicate scrolling handles on either side, resembling small puffed sleeves of a dress Thumbelina might wear.

The work is all functional, despite seemingly impossible contortions and exaggerations. The animated quality of the pieces is funny and entertaining, but well balanced with highly complex glazes and an impressive quality of craftsmanship. Joerling's work is yet another example of the myriad forms and directions that a fine ceramic artist can achieve.

—Heather Lustfeldt

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