



Fragments (installation view), 2000, concrete, found objects

Layers of Meaning and Found Objects

Caprice Stapley

New Work, sculptor Shaun Cassidy's current exhibition at Joseph Nease Gallery, is a conglomeration of styles and materials. By using a variety of approaches, Cassidy challenges the viewer to decipher his methodology — one limited neither visually nor ideologically.

Cassidy is not new to the local art scene. He taught at Kansas City Art Institute from 1996 to 1999 as a member of the sculpture faculty, and in 1998 Joseph Nease's inaugural exhibition presented *Sweet Surround*, a mammoth piece that incorporated confectioners' sugar and filled an entire room. Prior to his departure for Rock Hill, South

New Work
Shaun Cassidy
Joseph Nease Gallery
Through February 10

Carolina, where Cassidy currently is associate professor and director of the sculpture program at Winthrop University, he completed two site-specific commissions still on view in the area: *Oceotropic*, a structure utilizing ladders, ropes rings, and figurative elements, which dangles five stories from skylight to lower level in the stairwell of the Marietta Chair Building on Baltimore; and *Looking Through*, a concrete edifice located outdoors at the Cedar Creek Development in Olathe.

Most interesting of Cassidy's *New Work* is a work titled *Fragments*, comprising nine oversized cinderblocks placed at varying angles throughout the second gallery

Formed by pouring concrete into a plywood box and Styrofoam mold, each block contains an assortment of embedded found objects, ranging from plastic toys and crayons to seashells and miniature spools of thread appropriated from a sewing kit. Collected from family, friends, neighbors and Mother Nature, these objects create a treasure trove of the recognizable, compelling one to closely scrutinize them in order to discover every encased coin and stuffed animal surfacing through the purposefully broken bits of cement.

Like the countless numbers of articles found within each piece, multiple layers of meaning are evident in *Fragments*. On a simple level it is merely an assemblage of artifacts which the viewer can imagine belonging to a family or individual, evoking personal memories and response. Simultaneously, *Fragments* comments on how quickly and easily the cherished possessions of yesterday become the debris of today in our materialistic society, a society which rapidly accumulates only to discard. Seashells, contrasting the hard concrete with their fragile beauty, can represent the incessant desire to obtain: how many people have picked up a small shell on the beach and, while admiring its shape and color, continue to comb the sand, searching for an unbroken, bigger or better one? But just in case this introspection has become too weighty, Cassidy whimsically sinks large ceramic



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teeth into a few cinderblocks.

Stylistically, *Fragments* contrasts the minimal, smooth lines of *Bubble* and *Loop*, which dominate the first room of the gallery. Fashioned from white painted steel, both sculptures suggest a childlike playfulness; however, an underlying tension exists. Although physically static, *Bubble*'s kinetic undulation mimics the motion of an expanding soap bubble about to burst, while its curvaceous pipes smoothly transcend the two walls it rests against. *Loop* is innocently reminiscent of an old-fashioned childhood game, and sexually charged at the same time, its phallic-looking welded pipe projecting into the gallery space.

Double Vision, discreetly hanging in the gallery entry, remotely resembles *Fragments*, perhaps acting as its precursor. Split horizontally, the square-shaped *Double Vision* derives its patterns from a textile initially pushed into wet concrete and then removed. Utilizing this technique, articles of clothing, which actually have been extracted, appear to embellish *Fragments*, the illusion created by concrete absorbing the fabrics' dyes.

Without a consistent style, *New Work* as a whole feels fairly disjointed. But it demonstrates Cassidy's willingness to experiment, exemplifying a versatility that successfully embodies his diverse investigations into time, history, and memory.

Caprice Stapley is a freelance writer, and currently is completing a master's in art history. Prior to the birth of her daughter she worked for Kansas City, Missouri, Municipal Art Commission.