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Crossover Hits

Saturday night specials at bemisUNDERGROUND hype 2008 season

By Michael Joe Krainak

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Though a dream in 2004, the bemisUNDERGROUND began officially a year later under the vision of Mark Masuoka, the center's director and the leadership of Jeremy Stern, former assistant director. Situated at basement level in the Bemis Center at 12th and Leavenworth streets in the Old Market, the Underground's asymmetrical and alternative gallery space has not so simply been the place for area artists to experiment with visual, new media, performance and installation art.

So demanding is this space with its stairwells, window casings, low and exposed ceilings, angular pathways, ante chambers, nooks and crannies that bu's edgiest of shows have been true installations themselves transforming patrons to a unique time and place. In short, the Underground is most successful when a viewer feels like they are experiencing the space for the first time no matter how often visited.

Now three years later viewers once again anticipate another challenging Underground season hoping that all that is past is prelude. While bu2008 begins Feb. 1, under the guidance of its new director, Rachel Ziegler, also the managing director of B/C projects, viewers have already enjoyed a three-part "Saturday Art Series." Curated by artist and staff assistant Joey Lynch, the third and last installment of these weekend only events will feature "Visual Art by Musicians" this Saturday, Jan. 19, from 7-10 p.m.

Though this series continues the Underground's support of the area's more established artists who experiment with traditional media such as Omaha's Claudia Alvarez and Lincoln's Jake Gillespie, Lynch has made a concerted effort in this series to showcase emerging artists via his own nomadic venue, Tugboat Presents, especially those who are directly or indirectly successful in music and performance. After collaborating with several Saddle Creek musicians, Lynch, primarily a print artist, discovered that "performers from all music genres and backgrounds share a common thread of pursuing other artistic mediums. Many have degrees in visual art, design their own album art and use visual mediums as an extension to songwriting."

On that note, this Saturday's show will climax with work from the following area artists/musicians: Derek Pressnall (Tilly and the Wall), Jacob Thiele (The Faint), Austin Skiles (Eagle*Seagull), Teal Gardner (UUVVWWZ), Ben Swift (The Killigans) and Darren Keen (The Show is the Rainbow). Non-area artists include the incomparable Gillian Welch, Rachel Blumberg (Norfolk and Western) and Nick Zinner (Yeah Yeah Yeahs). If last weekend is any indication this Saturday's art vibe will continue another successful collaboration of mixed media as the Slowdown, etc. meets bemisUNDERGROUND.

Lynch says some of the artists will also perform musically, players to be announced, but the evening will be climaxed by the "return" of current Bemis resident, Jamie O'Shea from the past. O'Shea has locked himself in his second story studio since midnight, Jan. 1, blocking out his windows and setting artificial light to timers. He has also turned back his clock and placed all news and Internet communication on a delay to simulate a 36-hour day. When he exits and re-enters

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“real time” at the Bemis it will send him six days into the future as he catches up.

O’Shea titles his time-tripping performance “3:2” and has posted “messages from the past” from his Web site LiveNudeMachines.com. A recent post last Saturday at 10:14 p.m. (our time) headlined, “The event horizon,” this “time-traveler” commented on his self-imposed predicament: “I have found myself alone among the people of the future ... I’ve turned to crackpot theories of time and space and endothermic engines to keep me company. My attention to sound and detail is becoming sharper, too. I can hear plastic bags slowly unfurling across the room ... I get a little joy whenever the refrigerator or heat kicks on.” O’Shea’s experiment has had his undivided attention 24/7 – make that 36/7, his time – but he apologizes “if it doesn’t hold yours in a blog entry. I suppose this is quite navel gazing.”

Maybe, but it has never been Bemis’ or any other contemporary art center’s intention for its audience to “get it” immediately or automatically when confronted with the alternative or the avant garde. This is especially true of the Underground, where time-based and site-specific art mingle happily with more traditional media. The first event in this series offered such a mixed bag as it featured two local artists exhibiting locally for the first time. Guest curator Dan Siedell presented the work of writer Anthony Hawley, which included mixed media panels of encaustic, impasto and modeling wax on mirrors, all titled enigmatically “There is There.”

Along with Hawley, Zack Nipper showcased original artwork created for band Bright Eyes’ album covers. Nipper was recently nominated for a 2007 Grammy for his design of Bright Eye’s latest, “Cassadega.” His art here included original drawings, sculptures, applique», needlework and wallpaper cut from his own basement wall used for several albums. Especially gratifying are his three original tapestries from the album “I’m Wide Awake, It’s Morning,” particularly the night scene which effectively combines a world view and mood of fantasy and noir.

“Figurative Work by Four,” the second of these singular art happenings last weekend, marked a return to more traditional mediums from more established artists, Alvarez, Gillespie, Seth Johnson and Ashley Wick. Though they work in familiar ceramic, graphite, pencil and ink, their treatment of figurative content is decidedly edgy, even, at times, disturbing. Alvarez offered “At the Playground,” a painting and mini-installation of ceramic children who, while at play, are nonetheless depicted in form and technique as conflicted and underdeveloped. Wick’s untitled pen and ink nudes are equally compelling, but in the repetition of figure and expression the effect is even darker and more psychological.

In contrast were the works of Johnson and Gillespie, which are more conceptual and introspective. The former showed several graphite drawings on paper including figurative pieces “Sharon Tate” and “Cave Man Mask,” which demonstrated conversely a technique for realistic detail and precision and a penchant for the surreal. Gillespie has also tripped the dark fantastic in the past with his iconic superhero paintings, but none more so than his recent “Arrival at the Ball,” a highlight of all three shows. In this narrative, and no doubt more personal work, four figures seem posed in some sort of cosmic interlude oblivious to one another and unaware of the red-headed stranger stalking them.

The Saturday Art Series will conclude then this weekend with the aforementioned musical performances and reappearance, but the show will not ignore interesting visual samples from a longer list of musicians. Chief among these may be Welch’s, ink on paper, “I don’t know. I think it’s kind of a lousy dance,” Andy LeMaster’s “Self Portrait” in oil pastel and Dapose’s untitled acrylic on panel, all of which feature Lynch’s own predisposition for overlapping, colorful and graphic patterns, jarring images and the occasional socio-political motif. Overall, the evening promises to be a dramatic end to an eclectic three weeks, all of which may indeed be prelude to bU2008.

Helmsley art for sale



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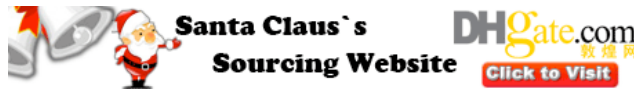
Leona Helmsley's estate will sell art and furniture from the real-estate developer's homes in New York, Greenwich, Connecticut, and Sarasota, Fla., to benefit the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, Bloomberg reported this week.

Helmsley's 19th-century furniture, American paintings, impressionist works and silver will be offered up for auction at Christie's this year.

Helmsley, who died last August, left most of her estate, valued at about \$4 billion, to charity. She also left \$12 million for her dog, Trouble.

Met gets first African sculpture

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has acquired its first major contemporary African sculpture, "Between Earth and Heaven," created by the Ghanaian artist El Anatsui in 2006. The work is made mostly from discarded liquor-bottle caps and stitched together with aluminum and copper wire. It evokes traditional West African kente cloth but transforms it into a glowing, crumpled wall sculpture.



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