



12:05 pm - October 18, 2012

Art: Art by art installers at MCQ's homey gallery

By Jenessa Kenway

Warm tan walls, a fireplace and a kitchen around the corner turn a gallery visit into a relaxed, casual experience — more of a friendly call on a neighbor. Situated inside a typical downtown home, the Michele Quinn Fine Art Advisory space interrogates the customary “white cube” gallery experience. At the same time, the homey environment means you can't help but start imagining the works in your own home.

While the space is commenting on traditional galleries, the work of each artist in the current exhibit, *Install Art Here*, comments on installation of art in galleries, mediating the overlap between art-creation and handling. *Install Art Here* showcases work by MCQ's five-man art installation crew, incorporating various aspects of “art handling” — such as signage, delivery, storage — into the works. The “art handler” theme is a return to and reworking of an exhibit concept from four years ago. “This time I said I don't want to just stick work up on the wall again, that's just boring,” Quinn explains.

“Probably the most interesting part of this exhibit is most of us don't work in installation,” adds artist Erik Beehn.

Jaws wide open, a black and orange shark by J.W. Caldwell occupies the driveway, greeting us with a toothy “come in, we're open.” Creatively solving the question of where to put the “open” sign, the piece humorously forces guests to walk across the hungry mouth while showcasing the artist's freehand lettering skills on the challenging grooved slabs of a cement surface.

Passing down the hall, we almost miss a cleverly installed R.C. Wonderly piece. Replacing the usual curtain used to mask off the “art handler work area,” where the art and tools are stored, Wonderly's minimalist, wool-felt-on-linen piece skillfully mends function with art, blurring the distinction.

“The thing with the curtain is, unless you know what's behind there, it probably goes unnoticed,” says Wonderly. “Another thing I like with my work is when it goes unnoticed. I'm sure there will be a lot of people that walk through here and don't even notice it.”

“My two criteria for taking a handling job,” he adds, “are if I want to talk to these guys ... or if it's a cool installation, like a piece from an artist I like. I went to the Bellagio once so they could show me the back of a [Frank] Stella ...”

In the backyard, Shawn Hummel “delivers” an uncharacteristically subtle piece, as well. Departing from his usual bold photography pieces, we find a large wooden box sitting on one end, like a shipment of art awaiting opening. A look through a peek-hole installed near the top reveals the image of a small glowing red room inside the box. Rather than just a means for shipping, the packaging becomes part of the art.

Going back inside to the living room, we find Mark Brandvik's NASA rocket ship cozily blasting off in place of a cheerful fire in the hearth. Benefiting hugely from the unusual installation spot, the surrealist, the Magritte-styled piece pays homage to the passing of Neil Armstrong and expresses the artist's fascination with the space program.

Glancing to the right, viewers find themselves in the backyard again, one of three exterior views Beehn photographically transplanted inside, tile by tile. "This is the first time I've done photo transfers," Beehn says. "I spent a week making a mess on the walls in the studio, and at the very end, I ran out of ink, so that's where the pink strip is ... but it shows what it is, so it works."

Faded colors, backwards fence tops and slight shifts in registration all address the natural imperfections and gaps that occur as we attempt to transfer locations experienced into memory.

"My intention was to create windows," Beehn explains. "In a sense, to break down what the wall obstructs so each view is actually what is on the other side of the wall of the house."

In the context of the exhibit, Beehn's piece emphasizes the importance of placement and interfacing with the gallery space, a critical element in art handling and an essential component to his installation piece.

The benefits of problem-solving and knowing how to physically handle work clearly translate into artists better equipped to solve problems that crop up on their own art — and making those issues work to their advantage. "Most artists just hand off their work without any D-rings on the back or anything!" says Wonderly. "Just seeing behind the scenes and how to problem-solve, you take some of those issues and use them in your own work."

Adds Beehn: "We gain an intimate experience that I don't think most people get."