

'Tilting the Basin' Unites the State's Art Scenes in a Glorious Show of Strength

Dawn-Michelle Baude Wed. Mar. 22, 2017 (3:00pm)



Galen Brown's hanging "1989 – Continuing" installation is one of many *Tilting the Basin* highlights. Photo by Yasmina Chavez

Let's teleport *Tilting the Basin: Contemporary Art of Nevada* from Las Vegas to Manhattan. Better yet, clone the whole thing; put a copy in London, another in Sao Paulo, one in Shanghai. The international art world should know: Nevada is home to first-rate artists who can hold their own anywhere.

Displayed in a gorgeous 14,000-square-foot warehouse, *Basin* convincingly argues the relevance of artwork made by 34 artists living throughout the state. Given the pitfalls of geographical survey shows, this one is surprisingly coherent. Co-curators JoAnne Northrup (Nevada Museum of Art) and Michele C. Quinn (MCQ Art Advisory) ensured mostly top-tier quality. Another unifying factor is the tendency toward tactile materials: embroidered fabric, stippled paper, clumps of wool, frozen tinsel, hand-blown glass, maybe even a household appliance or two.

Chief among the revelations is Galen Brown's "1989 – Continuing" installation featuring a colorful flock of 27 salvaged Christmas trees hanging upside-down from the 14-foot ceiling. The trees are shorn of branches, sanded and transformed from disgraced symbols of holiday frenzy into animistic objects with signature personalities. Some are erotic, some ridiculous, some are threatening, some short-haul spacecraft for mini E.T.s. Although impressive as a group, the fastidious workmanship lavished on each tree—copper cladding? toothpick belting?—merits careful inspection. "1989" offers a witty critique of consumer culture even as its totemic forms recall primal connections to nature.

Is there a tendency among Northern Nevada artists like Brown to link to the landscape? Katie Lewis' alabaster topographic drawings and Jeffrey Erickson's deserty dystopian archival print, among others, suggest so. The Southern group seems more attuned to the urban context of Las Vegas. Chris Bauder's "Untitled (pink balloon box)," its disarming display cabinet vibrating with breast-like organs, dissects both the sex industry and genetic engineering. Krystal Ramirez's delicate, ephemeral sculptures, based on the intimacy of handwriting and fragmented thought patterns, speak to issues of privacy in a city known for baring, if not blaring, all. Neon colors, too, correlate with the Southern group, appearing vividly in works by JW Caldwell, Gig Depio, Justin Favela, Brent Holmes, Wendy Kveck, JK Russ, Sean Slattery, David Ryan, Rachel Stiff and others.

Not every artist fits the Northern/Southern, nature/urban pattern. David Sanchez Burr's interactive, multimedia installation combines and recombines sound and materials in an experiential work as spontaneous as it is engaging. Brent Sommerhauser's numerous pieces—melting buckets, geysering wood flooring and mysterious silver and copper point drawings—also incorporate chance procedures in a materials-based aesthetic. Matthew Couper's intricate painting reads like an ex voto coded for the Singularity.

Tilting the Basin does more than make the case for excellent art produced in-state. Sponsored by the Nevada Museum of Art and the Art Museum at Symphony Park—a group working to establish a future art museum in Las Vegas—the exhibition also begs the question: Where can we see this art permanently?

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Tilting the Basin on view March 16 through May 14 at a pop up facility, located at 920 S. Commerce Street, Las Vegas.

Wednesday –Sunday, 10 am to 6 pm, Fridays until 9pm