

East Austin Studio Tour 2008

Open Studios and Galleries, Austin

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by Andrea Mellard



Virginia Yount

Jackpot (detail), 2008

Found lottery tickets, glue, trash, fake money

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

Now in its seventh year, the East Austin Studio Tour (E.A.S.T.) has grown to become an anticipated annual event. The tour offers an impossible variety of options, from exploring the environments where artists work, to collecting reasonably priced local art and crafts, to discovering emerging artists. And while E.A.S.T. proves that creativity thrives east of I-35, the diversity of work by over 200 artists and the inclusive nature of the tour make further generalizations challenging. Throughout the weekend two questions echoed among the tour's viewers: "What studios have you been to?" followed by "But have you seen anything good yet?" Do I wish that I had chosen harder companions and pressed on to just one or two more studios? Yes, and next year I know which studios I will revisit. The following are my tour highlights including insights into creative practices, process-oriented work, innovative collaborations and playful installations.

Each year E.A.S.T. offers access to studios as unique as the art made inside them. The studios of Philippe Klinefelter and Okay Mountain both offered particularly rewarding behind-the-scenes perspectives. Klinefelter creates "sculptural architecture" using timeless-looking tools in an industrial shop. His latest work in progress, *Earth Fountain*, a hollowed orb carved from a 57-ton

block of granite, offers a glimpse into a master craftsman's practice. In contrast, the small studios run by the emerging artist collective Okay Mountain are a hive of creative exchange. Details tacked to the walls reveal artists' processes, like the sketches of cartoon deer that began Peat Duggins' tapestry project recently shown at Art Palace, or the church-camp group photos that Ryan Lauderdale morphed into psychedelic tribal drawings.

E.A.S.T. avoids categorizing art, and works by Kendra Kinsey and Debra Broz are a model of seamlessly merging craft materials into fine art. Kinsey slices and collages glossy fashion magazines, sometimes wrapping webs of thread and fabric over their cut surfaces. By dissecting and re-packaging glamorous images, often of women's hair and skin, Kinsey examines the connections between exterior and interior, protection and vulnerability. Debra Broz creates art that flirts with beautiful and grotesque imagery. Like Dr. Frankenstein, she draws on her expertise in ceramic restoration to reconfigure kitschy animal figurines with unusual anatomies. She also alters found books and her own drawings with hand-sewn patterns, delicately obscuring their meanings with sutures of red thread.

A few innovative projects exemplify how the artistic community comes together for E.A.S.T. At Monofonus Press Studio, Ed Davis was screen printing bandanas with standard patterns, that changed with aid of 3-D movie glasses. Michelle Devereux conceived of the 3-D bandana project and together they refashioned the concept of a traditional, mass-produced, utilitarian object. In a studio on site, Matt Rebholz showed off his finely rendered allegorical prints. This bohemian enclave produces an annual subscription for three multi-media packages a year comprised of visual, literary or musical elements by Monofonus collaborators and Rebholz' Golem prints will inspire their next project. At Big Medium, E.A.S.T. collaborator Shea Little, inspired by a dumpster full of schematic drawings he found, created digital collages of suffocating detail. Wryly, these stark illustrations of the inner workings of electronics tangle together several exploded diagrams with confounding results. At MASS Gallery, blips and bleeps from the musical monster truck, National Instrument, broadcast throughout the parking lot. This hybrid, unlike the tiny Toyota Prius favored by E.A.S.T. tourists, looks as if Rube Goldberg constructed it with parts from a Hummer and a wooly mammoth. Made of found cardboard, 2 x 4's and house paint, this wonderfully absurd interactive sculpture is the third project since 2007 for collaborators Scott Eastwood, Jules Buck Jones, Drew Liverman and Michael Phalan.

Next year, don't miss installations during E.A.S.T., some of which may only last for the weekend of the tour. Artist Virginia Yount's installation, at first glance, looked like swept-up detritus. Grackles sculpted from lottery tickets pick over plastic bags and aluminum cans. Upon closer viewing, this trash reveals treasure, with play money spilling out of the bags. Using found materials, Yount implicates a wasteful consumer culture. Austin Video Bee celebrated their

second video compilation with a cohesive show by the collective's members. Recent videos by Rebecca (Marks) Leopold and Ivan Lozano quietly meditate on memory and loss. Co-Lab celebrated the creativity community at the heart of the studio tour with a BYOM (bring your own materials) participatory installation. Saturday afternoon I entered a neon-colored playhouse filled with graffiti, streamers of tape, toys and, inexplicably, a bucket full of locks labeled "free." It was clear to the children happily wielding cans of spray paint that anybody can join in and have fun making art. While commendable for its inclusive nature, the result was mixed—a comment true of the East Austin Studio Tour as a whole.

The January 16, 2009 issue of ...might be good will feature an interview with E.A.S.T. founders and organizers Shea Little, Joseph Phillips and Jana Swec addressing the purpose, challenges and future of the tour.

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