

ARTS

'Drawnonward: Jonathan Gruchawka & Mark Leavens'

Decay, distress, and destruction are the themes in the multidisciplinary works by these two artists

REVIEWED BY SETH ORION SCHWAIGER, FRI., AUG. 1, 2014



'Drawnonward: Jonathan Gruchawka & Mark Leavens'

Co-Lab Project Space, 613 Allen

www.co-labprojects.org

Through Aug. 2

The show presents installation, paintings, objects, and video of disused structures that bear the hallmarks of utilitarian form and, through these, addresses decaying forces particular to human fabrication.

Gruchawka's *Moving Backwards* fills the interior space with rough timber framing, suspended wires, and an 8-channel sound system encased in bizarre cubic jelly at various points in the structure. The audio dips in and out of discernibility, partly because of the clip itself, and partly because it's muffled by the broth-colored gelatin. If the framing is a skeleton, the physical remnants of a structure, then the sound is the structure's ghost, the remnants of the soul.

A few speakers have broken free, having rattled a section of the sickly gel loose and splatting it bloblike on the floor below. I was suspicious of it being an accident, but the murmurs from the opening crowd conferred that it brought something to the piece. It made those forces of decay no less nefarious, but strangely seductive and ongoing – like we were each waiting for the next bit to fall off or the structure to collapse in on itself.

Paintings by both Gruchawka and Leavens are scattered about the back hall, abstracting similar forgotten structures. Leavens' work is more polite than Gruchawka's, but there's less there for me to linger with. His brightly colored untitled mural outside the gallery, however, does tie the actual building to the work it contains. It also provides a more optimistic spin on the show, more concerned with internal architecture's formal qualities of light, shadow, and color than its conceptual qualities or potential as metaphor.

Within view of the mural stands Gruchawka's *Drawn Onward* like a modern-day Henge. The series of boxy forms, the height of a man, are made of plaster, cardboard, lathe, and cheap pine in a method mimicking an older tradition of wall finishing. The sculptures are in various states of distress, one relatively untouched (or repaired) and others demolished.

Paired with this installation screens *Dialogue in Progress*, a video work by Gruchawka and collaborator Madie Evans. One of the previous structures is circled by two actors: one constantly repairing, the other destroying. As more plaster and pine is administered like a bandage by one actor, equal or greater destruction is brought by the other with increasingly detrimental tools, a box cutter, a spade, a sledgehammer. A fellow viewer spoke my mind to his partner: "Haven't you ever been in a relationship like that?" In the end, the structure is destroyed.

This piece more than the others supports the notion vibrating in the atmosphere above the exhibition that permanence is a myth and that maintenance is the only force holding our human reality together.

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