

Salt Peanuts strikes idiosyncratic chord

By DOUGLAS BRITT Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle

April 8, 2009, 5:34PM



Julia Kunin's Cascade

Julia Kunin

Named after the Dizzy Gillespie bebop masterpiece, Salt Peanuts at Inman Gallery brings together six artists for a group exhibition that aims not to illustrate a theme but to embody a mood — that of “rhythmic idiosyncrasy,” according to owner Kerry Inman and director Patrick Reynolds, who together curated the show.

They succeed through smart use of sight lines, juxtaposing artists with few obvious commonalities whose work nevertheless sits comfortably together — at times playing off one another, in other cases balancing each other out. Making this work takes a certain knack — like the ability to throw a party where the guests don’t know each other, but they all hit it off.

Julia Kunin’s glazed porcelain sculptures anchor the main gallery, ripe with the kinds of tension that make the show interesting. Each is a vertical diptych in which one piece sits somewhat uneasily atop the other. Inspired by the fantastical forms of scholars’ rocks and garden grottos, Kunin builds her sculptures from cast plants, insects and sea creatures to create mysterious structures that conjure up mysterious, conflicting associations.

Looking at Cascade, I found myself thinking first of coral formations, then of yogurt-covered pretzels ... and then of the fact that the sculpture looks like a dog may have urinated on it. That comingling of tastiness and ickiness is one of many internal contradictions that keeps you looking at Kunin’s work long after you meant to turn away.

Internal tensions, and perhaps a note of boiled-over frustration, also inhabit Dana Frankfort’s oil paintings of upper-cased words — PEOPLE and EDGE — which somehow seem both dashed off and labor intensive, both casual and formally rigorous.

Frankfort’s declarative painterly statements — the magenta-raspberry PEOPLE, in particular, seems like it wants to grab and shake you — are offset by miniature works on paper by David Dupuis. Equal parts surreal, psychedelic and seductive, they lure viewers into dreamy land- and seascapes lit with an unearthly glow and populated by floating heads or unblinking eyes.

Shaun O’Dell’s works on paper, while abstract, seem culturally loaded with patterns and iconography derived from what the gallery describes as his “recent inquiry into the influence of Persia on myriad aspects of Western culture.” They convey a language you can’t quite interpret but whose grammar you can sense.

Sweetness prevails in the smaller north gallery, where Dario Robleto has hung a mobile of airplanes made from candy wrappers taken from an installation by the late conceptual artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

Metaphors for the loss of his lover to AIDS-related illness, Gonzalez-Torres' "candy spill" pieces invited viewers to take a piece of candy, contributing to the artworks' gradual disappearance. By making a sculpture, *I Miss Everyone Who Has Ever Gone Away*, out of what once wrapped those candies, Robleto has both paid homage to Gonzalez-Torres' influence and asserted his independence from it, since he's created a singular, handmade object in contrast to a purely conceptual piece that can be assembled by curators.

Robleto's candy-wrapper airplanes float across the room from David Ayslworth's candy-colored abstract paintings, whose angular shapes echo Robleto's folded forms.

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