

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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Paul Cowan, Brendan Fowler, Chadwick Rantanen, Dan Rees at Shane Campbell Gallery

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Installation view. Courtesy of Shane Campbell Gallery

The collection of works by Paul Cowan, Brendan Fowler, Chadwick Rantanen, and Dan Rees at Shane Campbell Gallery add up to an exhibition that is greater than the sum of its individual parts. In his own way, each artist imbues an existing object and/or the space of the gallery with low-key but engaging creative intention. This makes for a surprisingly cohesive exhibition despite the fact that Cowan, Fowler, Rantanen, and Rees each have distinctly recognizable artistic styles.

This sense of cohesion stems in part from the artists' use of prefabricated and manufactured objects. In a series of pieces titled Telescopic Pole (2012), Chadwick Rantanen has placed six aluminum and plastic poles throughout the gallery that span the distance between the floor and ceiling. In the middle of the space, Brendan Fowler built Summer 2012 Wall (2012), a seven and half foot tall T-shaped modular exhibition wall, part of which Paul Cowan has

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painted with a khaki shade of off-white latex paint scented with vetiver oil. On this wall hangs an orange-brown inkblot painting by Dan Rees titled *Flesh Tint* (2012). Rees's paintings are arguably the most idiosyncratic works in the show, though his process – which involves applying paint to a canvas, then pressing the canvas against a surface within the space – eliminates a great deal of the artist's personal touch. The companion piece to Rees's *Flesh Tint* canvas can be found on the gallery door.



"Summer 2012 Wall," 2012, Brendan Fowler. Lumber, Drywall, Latex Paint. 90 x 48 x 4.25 in. / "Untitled," 2012, Paul Cowan. Vetiver Oil in Latex Paint On Wall. / "Flesh Tint," 2012, Dan Rees. Acrylic On Canvas, Imprint on Window. 15.75 x 11.81 in. Courtesy of Shane Campbell Gallery.

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Each of these pieces also negotiates boundaries, both within the architectural limits of the gallery space and within more traditional definitions of artistic practice. Rantanen's poles call attention to the verticality of the space and diffuse one's attention to what's going on above and below eye-level. The artist's piece reminds us that, like so many old buildings in Chicago, Shane Campbell Gallery has a really beautifully molded ceiling, one that carries the unique history of the space. Fowler's walls are at once architecture, a sculpture, an exhibition space, an object, and a subject, while Rees's paintings are simultaneously performative site-specific installations and painterly objects that are tethered to the gallery space and the temporality of the show. By infusing traditional art objects with qualities inherent to practices like performance and architecture, the artists are blurring the distinctions between all of these modes of creation in order to create new and dynamic possibilities. Traditional definitions of what art can be become less and less meaningful as more artists around the world are creating work that straddles several different fences at once, pointing the way to a future in which art may become something else entirely.



"Untitled," 2012, Paul Cowan. Fishing Lures on Canvas. 75 x 56 in. / "Untitled," 2012, Paul Cowan. Cypress Oil in Latex Paint. / "Telescopic Pole (Drive Medical/Grey)," Chadwick Rantanen. Powdercoated Aluminum, Plastic, Walkerballs. 269 x 1.5 in. Courtesy of Shane Campbell Gallery.

And just as these artists are exploring new tendencies within contemporary art, the kinds of tendencies that will hopefully lead to new galaxies of creative possibility, they are also keeping with a certain trend in contemporary society that is increasingly post-human. I'm not arguing that the artists in the show are consciously espousing any specific agenda, but the work in the show does reflect a broader social fascination with the ways in which human consciousness has extended itself through technology and industrialization and outside of an embodied experience. This isn't the type of art that meets viewers half way. I think highly of the show, so this is less a criticism and more of an observation. The use of sterile materials such as aluminum poles, fishing lures, latex paint, and drywall, and the impersonally manufactured quality of objects like monochromatic

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canvases and the free-standing wall lend an anonymous quality to the show. Looking around the gallery, I got a strong sense of arrangement and intentionality, but little sense of the reasoning behind that intentionality, like an archeologist confronting artifacts from an undiscovered society whose intelligence is clear, even if its purposes are not. What are we to make of the fishing lures in Cowan's canvases or the walkerballs at the ends of Rantanen's aluminum poles? It doesn't seem as though they are meant to be fully understood, though their presence is provocative. They operate at a distance that does not lend itself to conventional understanding. As I mentioned above, I find that to be an interesting quality that makes me want to engage with the work further, even if the work itself may not feel the same way.

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