

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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Cherries on Top

Sister show puts sculpture on a pedestal

By Arty Nelson *Thursday, Jul 1 2004*

Most concept-based art shows suffer from the same malady that afflicts much “conceptual” art: They suck. Or, to put it more mildly, they’re really boring unless somebody with an MFA is standing by to point out all the banal art-history references that the artist has taken great pains to incorporate in a way that’s usually neither new nor compelling. Last January, sculptor Jason Meadows and his now, but not-yet-then, fiancée, the gallerist Katie Brennan, spent a dog walk in Elysian Park kicking around the idea for a sculpture show that Meadows had been mulling over for years. The show is now fully and quite powerfully realized as “The Thought That Counts” at Brennan’s new gallery, Sister, in Chinatown.

“It started as a ‘wouldn’t it be cool if’ kind of thing and gathered momentum from there, mainly from talking to people and doing studio visits. My goal was to create discrete arenas or contexts for works that I liked, and since most of the works were relatively small and needed some kind of base, I thought, why use standard pedestals? Why not make sculptural supports to tweak the dynamic?” says Meadows, who shows both his sculpture and his drawings regularly at Marc Foxx in Los Angeles and Tanya Bonakdar in NYC, and is having his third solo show in London this fall at Corvi-Mora.

“Jason was talking about the nature of bases and functional objects in art, and then he said he thought it’d be interesting to build objects that were functional in an art way — support structures or contexts for other sculptures,” adds the lithe Brennan, who, following stints at the Dan Bernier Gallery at 6150 Wilshire as well as the Project, where she was the L.A. director, launched Sister last spring in a three-way partnership with Bob Gunderman and Randy Sommer, both of ACME at 6150. “It brings to mind all sorts of things — Brancusi’s ideas about ‘the base,’ for one. And I like the idea of having these different conversations going on between the sculptors, and the collaborative aspects of it. Some of the objects are discrete in that they can be viewed separately, either base or sculpture, and some are more symbiotic, e.g., Evan Holloway’s sculpture is not complete without the base and comes from a more collaborative approach to art making.”

As you follow the high-energy Meadows through the gallery, the point is easier to grasp when you see how the bases have pulled the show together, giving the assorted works a strong sense of cohesion within the space, but at the same time have maintained each piece’s uniqueness. “Some of the works were completed when chosen, and actually needed a base to be viewed, a straight-up sculpture-pedestal relationship — and some evolved as a collaborative-type dialogue, a bit more organic in nature,” says Meadows. “I wanted a cadence to the show, each relationship being individual, so you

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have to take it case by case.”

The roster of contributing artists is impressive and consists almost entirely of up-and-coming L.A. artists. “I love the Marvel team-up vibe,” Meadows says of the lineup. Even better, and quite rare, is that the pieces themselves are of a caliber commensurate with the pedigree of their creators. For instance, there’s the piece by the aforementioned Evan Holloway, who, like Meadows, shows at Marc Foxx in L.A. and was tapped back in 2002 to participate in the always-controversial barometer of American now-ness, the Whitney Biennial.

“It’s one of several pieces I made in an attempt to come up with one appropriate thing to send to a Howard Dean fund-raising event last November,” says the artist. “It’s made out of steel and plaster and paint, seven heads painted in different skin tones that connect to the base via steel rods at a regular interval along a central strip which is divided into a ROYGBIV color scale. Each head is dedicated to a color.” Holloway says the only problem was that the piece had a design flaw that made it likely to tip over, which is where Meadows came in. Using scrap plywood from Holloway’s studio, Meadows built a base drawing off the figurative reference of a “thumbs-up” that both satisfied Meadows’ desire to affirm his friend’s piece and solved the logistical/artistic problem.

When Meadows first saw Pentti Monkkonen’s *Beach House*, which at its core consists of a ball fashioned of geometric panels, some of which are painted wood and others of which contain nature photos, he felt like the obvious resolution would be to build a deck he fashioned with a redwood lathe to accentuate what appears as some kind of otherworldly architectural model.

Another model piece, literally, is Meadows’ *Smile* collaboration with Liz Lerner, who shows at Regen Projects in L.A. and 303 in New York, and who also used to employ Meadows. *Smile* consists of two of Lerner’s studio models constructed from foam core, both of which bear a strong resemblance to a smile, or even preening seals, positioned with one sitting atop a Meadows wood table and the other resting underneath. To allow for better visibility of the floor piece, Meadows has removed half the table’s top, which also enhances the “model/study” quality already inherent in the piece.

Using part of a piece titled *Venice Witch* from her critically acclaimed show last fall at Marianne Boesky in New York, Liz Craft’s piece with Meadows, *Witch*, is a clever duet featuring a pair of Craft’s human-scale cast hands emerging from a Meadows signpost-like base that resembles a windowsill out of which the spooky hands are thrust.

For Craft, coming off not only a big solo in New York but also the most recent Whitney Biennial, the Sister show is an enjoyable reprieve from the demands of a blossoming career that has her doing group shows this summer at both Boesky and Metro Pictures in NYC, Regen Projects in L.A., and Migros Museum in Zurich, all while preparing for a solo turn at Sadie Coles in London. “It’s nice to do some more casual shows in L.A. that friends will see,” muses Craft. “It’s fun to go away, and then it’s fun to come

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back.”

To round out the show, there’s an amazing 11-foot-high piece called *Totem Stick*, courtesy of Meadows and Mason Cooley out of the China Art Objects camp; a wall relief made from two of painter Mark Grotjahn’s masks; and *Football Duck*, for which Meadows teamed up with New Yorker Sean Landers (the only non-Angeleno collaboration), who is slated for a show in tandem with China Art Objects at Sister this fall. The ingenious *Football Duck* consists of a bronze Donald Duck football head mounted on a Meadows Doric column made by egg-crating Plexiglas panels.

“The challenging thing for me about this show is that there were so many people that I had in mind to please. First, there was me, and, of course, there’s the audience, but then with this show, there were also all of these artists, and you want them to like the way their pieces end up,” Meadows says. “I mean, the last thing I wanted was to have one of the artists come to the show and like how all the other pieces came out but then hate their own.”

THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS | Sister, 437 Gin Ling Way, Chinatown
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