

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Whitewall Magazine
March 2014

ANTHONY PEARSON'S SERIOUSLY HEAVY AND SOPHISTICATED ETCHED PLASTERS



Everything looks like it might pull the wall down and crush whoever is nearby, so we stand in the middle of David Kordansky Gallery, far from the objects. The artist is Anthony Pearson, and he is nearly as imposing as the objects: Lex Luthor shaved head, a sneer, and a big frame. Under the exterior, though, Pearson is easygoing. Things aren't always as they seem in his work either.

The objects are wet newspaper gray, tofu white, and black pearl, and they hang on a wall, framed like paintings. Folks who can't really see things for what they are flounce words like "sculptural paintings." These are not paintings, in fact—though they resemble a pacifist version of the violent work from Paul Schimmel's

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“Destroy the Picture” show—but heavier. “Sometimes it’s as simple as me taking an angle grinder and striking [the surface],” said Pearson. “It’s less about canvas and more about surface.”

That particular piece, *Untitled (Etched Plaster)* (2014), has the look of an ice hockey rink, ice carved by a single skater. It hangs in a row of eight similar pieces, some black, some white, some intricately patterned to almost be Op Art psychedelic, some more minimally incised. David Kordansky, the artist’s dealer, interjects with the notion that it might come from a mish-mash of Pearson’s former life as a vinyl collector and dealer and the concepts of multiples that the California Light and Space artists explored. “This work is indexical, and about the cataloging of gesture,” said Kordansky, “which is a very West Coast notion.”

Pearson plays with ideas of light and space with his scoring as well, the light hitting the tiny mountains and valleys of his etched surfaces, creating an image that acts almost as a lenticular, shifting in appearance as the viewer sees it from different angles. Even though they are literally hundreds of pounds, the pieces give an illusion of airiness and weightlessness at the same time, even the black ones. “The light defines these [works],” said Pearson.

The works are made from a material called hydrocal that Pearson describes perfunctorily as “cement.” He pours them in his studio, lets them dry, smoothens the surfaces to a lustre somewhere between silky and waxy, then draws geometric patterns on them, before cutting, slicing, chiseling. Like a sculptor. “They begin as flat slabs of hydrocal—which is silica and gypsum based—and those slabs are sanded perfectly and finished,” says Pearson. “And then, through a series of moves, I’m able to create depth. [Some] are scored with an implement. Imagine a long-edged jig.”

Pearson only began working as an artist at the age of 37 in 2007, after the career as a rare vinyl dealer, and almost a decade after he graduated from UCLA where he studied photography. “I’m not one of those artists that had a very warm reception out of school,” he said with a laugh. He can laugh, because this is his third solo show at Kordansky. But what’s notable is that Pearson follows a thread with his work. Though his previous works were more photographic, these new works are basically those photographs expanded out from the 2D world.

What’s most interesting about Pearson’s new show, however, is the elegance of it all. These pieces are incongruously minimal to their manufactured creation, and that highly skilled, yet handcrafted quality gives way to the indexical meticulousness and allows those two ideas to exist on the same plane. This is rare, as is the sophistication of Pearson’s new show.

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