

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Indy Week
April 11, 2012

Chris Bradley finds creative opportunities in the simplest of objects in *Close One* at CAM Raleigh

by Julie Thomson



Photo courtesy of CAM and the artist

Chris Bradley's "Semi #2" (2012), urethane paint, acrylic paint, canvas, wood, hardware and nylon

John Cage, quoting Zen, once said, "If something is boring after two minutes try it for four. If it is still boring try it for eight, 16, 32, and so on. Eventually one discovers that it's not boring at all but very interesting." A shared sense of opportunity in boredom permeates Chris Bradley's paintings, sculptures and assemblages on view in the Independent Weekly Gallery at CAM Raleigh because of the ways he preserves—even monumentalizes—the creativity sparked by mundane moments.

Bradley also sees the value of re-presenting things that are so familiar to us that we've stopped noticing. Cage did this with silence, and Cage's friend Jasper Johns accomplished it with his targets and flags. Bradley chooses pretzel rods, pizza, pushpins, potato chips and backs of trucks, among other things, continually seeking ways to return them to our consciousness.

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Take pretzel rods. Chances are at some point you've pretended to smoke one like a cigar or played with this snack, thinking nothing of how you creatively engaged it. Using nine rods in "Clyde" (2011), Bradley builds a six-legged, headless creature. In "Horizon" (2011), he lines up multiple pretzels end-to-end, creating a horizon line installed low on the gallery wall. However, he's not using actual pretzel rods; instead, they are exquisitely painted bronze replicas. His choice of this lasting medium further monumentalizes these creative gestures made when bored or goofing around.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAM AND THE ARTIST

Chris Bradley's "Clyde" (2011), painted cast bronze and hot glue

Pizza is another form Bradley utilizes in a number of works. "Crust Ring" (2011), another convincing trompe l'oeil bronze reproduction, preserves the act of arranging uneaten crusts into a circle. Bradley shows the creative opportunity available to anyone who finds these potential materials: It's easy to imagine satiated diners mindlessly rearranging the remaining crusts as conversation continues.

Bradley also reminds us how lingering pizza boxes can become creative surfaces. "Tequila Sunset" (2012), a cigarette ash drawing on a painted metal duplicate of a pizza box, captures how this discarded material encourages our doodling and writing tendencies. In other pizza boxes known as the "Grease Face" series, he indulges an apparent compulsion to make faces out of pushpins, using painted bronze versions of the pins as eyes along with re-created grease and slice cuts as facial details. Sometimes he carves names into the box.

"Target" is the title of another series of Bradley's assemblages. While initially these seem to result from the long periods an artist spends in the studio, they also preserve and emphasize the effort to make something—anything—out of available materials. Simple yet interesting combinations such as "Target #4" (2010), a ridged (bronze) potato chip clamped to a wire

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rod extending from a stone base, might easily be ignored in a studio. But at CAM—partly because of the attentiveness fostered by the gallery—viewers can focus on the potato chip, examine its shape and form, and ponder their instinctual responses about what to do with it.

In the "Semi" series, Bradley turns his attention to the backs of semi trucks, spaces seen but often ignored by the drivers behind them. Once again he doesn't use the actual objects: He creates them out of paint and canvas, though he adds actual hardware to some. In "Semi #1" and "Semi #2" (both 2012), he includes a layer of dust and, more important, words and phrases that imagined passersby have written, returning these creative gestures to our attention.

Through Facebook and the Internet, we've become skilled at expressing ourselves creatively online (**the Born Digital exhibition in CAM's upper galleries** further reflects this), and it's worth noting that Bradley's work is firmly rooted in our experiences with actual objects. After seeing *Close One*, chances are that the next time you come across pretzel rods, pizza, potato chips and dirty vehicles, you'll pay attention to them in new ways and you'll have to decide how to react to the opportunities they present. It is in those moments that you'll realize the impact of Bradley's work.

Note: CAM's Independent Weekly Gallery is so named per an agreement between the museum and this paper's business department. The Indy editorial department has no special relationship with the gallery.

This article appeared in print with the headline "Making something out of the ordinary."

Close One
Chris Bradley
CAM Raleigh
Through May 28

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