

Cutting Culture at Buffalo Arts Studio

In the current exhibition at Buffalo Arts Studio, artists **Josef Bajus** and **Kurt Treeby** have both introduced unexpected bodies of work. While neither artist has changed their general disposition or take on the world, each has further revealed exactly what makes them tick to their audience.

Bajus is well known locally as a fiber artist, working largely in paper and staples on minimalist fields, usually in black or white. With his ex-



Above: Josef Bajus's "Junk Mail/ Curved Circle" at Buffalo Arts Studio.

Left: A detail of Kurt Treeby's latch hook rendition of Picasso's "Guernica."

trina—in the form of a centrifuge made from tar paper that looks a bit like the top of a volcano—sits quietly at the center of the gallery.

The artist's most graceful works are two layered wall hangings made with postcard images of Ocean City and Atlantic City from 1905. Each destination is captured in its heyday. Printed on interfacing that is layered about 10 sheets deep, the artist cuts into the layers, to create a kind of shaggy weaving. The transparency of the fabric allows images to show



through.

In his exhibit, "Curved Circle," the artist takes on the printed image and issues of environmentalism. Kurt Treeby is a younger artist who has not yet shown his work as frequently as Bajus. However, over the past five years Treeby has been steadily working on labor-intensive paintings of meticulous still lifes, eye charts, and games in his studio space at Buffalo Arts Studio. Treeby's exhibit, "Floor to Ceiling," will come as a surprise to anyone who has watched his progress in the studio up to this point as he has now turned the tables—creating a latch hook rugs of all things!

Josef Bajus came to Buffalo from the Czech Republic several years ago to lead the fiber art department at Buffalo State College. Working primarily in paper, the artist cuts, folds and weaves just as one would with more traditional fabrics of the genre. Looking at this show, and knowing Bajus is a recent immigrant, one has to wonder if he was totally overwhelmed by the sheer bulk of junk mail received as a resident of the United States. In "Junk Mail/ Curved Circle" Bajus creates lovely arcs mounted on the wall made out of torn and folded scraps from the recycling bin. Unbelievable and inspiring, this piece reminds us that something beautiful can be made from anything.

Bajus transforms recycled paper and views of the Ozone from the Internet into beautiful manifestations of the ill effects propagated by the environmental intrusions of human kind. A small homage to Hurricane Ka-

Kurt Treeby's latch hook rug of Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" (a depiction of death, bull fights and the crucifixion) brings the master to the floor (literally). The rug is 11-by-30 feet and nearly fills the floor of Buffalo Arts Studio's back gallery. For "Floor to Ceiling" Treeby spent two years and ten days hooking this rug in his living room, translating the massive painting onto a grid surface and compulsively making this large low art version of one of the most talked about masterpieces in art history. Kurt Treeby's devotion to this project is both mystifying and fabulous. The project seems nearly insane, as one could easily have the same image made into a rug by any number of textile producing / rug making companies. Yet that is the beauty of this piece — its insanity.

The finished piece is quite becoming—one really wants to roll on it, to lounge in front of a fireplace on the black, grey, white and blue shades of its shag. So is the artist laughing at the Picasso or admiring it?

Treeby continues his work in this new, laborious medium with "Sistine Suite" which includes several small panels of Michelangelo's work for the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. With this piece, the artist brings the ceiling of the famed church to the walls of the warehouse gallery space. "The Fall and the Expulsion" shows Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden in 1970s acrylic yarn colors. Pixilated by the grid of the latch hook, the



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painting reflects contemporary technology. "And here is yet another way to bring great art into your home!" you might say. Certainly it is a witty contemporary comment on the contradictions of our society, as well as a statement about Treeby's devotion to his work.

Both exhibits continue through March 25.

The Painter Painting the Painting at Insite

"Paintings of Pictures of People with Paintings" is the title of **Bruce Adams'** exhibit currently being shown at **Insite Gallery**. The paintings tell the story of viewing art in white box museum spaces. As you walk into the space, the painting to the left of the door comically looks like a couple of young people sitting on a sofa watching TV. The couple is holding museum tour wands up to their ears—the kind provided by most museums these days—and both have the kind of dumbed-out expression one gets when watching TV. This is not what you'd expect to see in an art gallery.

Adams has visited museums around this country and France, taken pictures of people looking at art at each location, and used those same photos for his paintings. Each painting shows a person or several people checking out a work of art with varying degrees of interest. This group of paintings was made over several years and includes a few different approaches to the work. Some paintings present the gallery spectators in a photo-realism style. In others, where the photograph may have been blurry, the features are not clearly depicted. In each painting there are three main components — the artwork they are looking at (usually a recognizable painting or era of painting), the people doing the looking, and the white space in between.

The white space of these paintings can be distracting. Take for instance, the largest painting in this show, which is about 16-feet wide by 7-feet tall. Here, two groups of people are looking at the same small Impressionist painting. In this massive work which fills the main exhibition wall, the angles of the people and the painting being depicted sets up an interesting sense of space. The painting falls flat when you walk up close and look at the surface. Adams uses an entirely different painting technique in the white area, which is the majority of the painting. The white wall is painted in large, fast brush strokes, with lack of attention to the way the white space touches the people and painting. While it is obvious that portraying the artwork or the people in the paintings can be more complicated than creating white space, that is not a good enough excuse. In a world where Robert Ryman devotes his life to painting fields of white, the background of any painting needs to be dealt with just as much thought as the "subjects." Otherwise, the entire work falls apart.

Nonetheless, Bruce Adams should be applauded for this significant body of work and the effort put into these pictures. "Paintings of Pictures of People with Paintings" is on view through March 12 at Insite Gallery (810 Elmwood Ave., behind the Neighborhood Collective).

—cynn timer

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