

Despite the fact that Asterisk Gallery has been actively exhibiting regional and national artists since May 2001, the Tremont space has drawn little attention from Cleveland's art critics.

This may be because the gallery has a reputation for being the art-world equivalent of a frat house, or a club house for white boys; openings at Asterisk often morph into drunken revels that have resulted in fistfights and smashed artworks. The lack of critical interest in the gallery's exhibitions might also be attributed to the politically incorrect nature of some of the shows, such as last year's *Spictacular*, an exhibition of work by Latino artists that was curated by Gabriel Gonzalez

and Paulen Perez, or the sophomoric quality of the work, which most recently included a series of wooden block collage-sculptures by gallery proprietor Dana Depew. Depew's pieces, collectively titled *Things I wish I said, but never did*, include a variety of puerile sentences such as "***** you loser," "Go ***** your mother," and "I hate you," spelled out in toy wooden blocks. Despite all the chaos and angry-boy angst that seems to be a core element of Asterisk, there are moments where the work on view is just too compelling to ignore; such is the case with the gallery's current exhibition of work by Cleveland artist Doug Meyer, titled *Orbus*.



MIXMASTER

Meyer creates new LPs by gluing vintage records in Quadcut Records .

Meyer recently moved to Cleveland following a two-year stint in Salt Lake City, and four years in his native Akron, where he tried to bolster the Rubber City's scant art community. He is, for the most part, an untrained artist, having dropped out of the Meyers School of Art at the University of Akron after just one semester in the early 1990s. Meyer credits Akron's Kenmore High School art teachers for cultivating his artistic talent. The artist's early work of the mid-1990s mostly consisted of sculptural objects and graffiti-inspired abstract paintings; Meyer refers to that time as his "psychedelic period." But he eventually grew frustrated over the futility of trying to communicate deeply spiritual and personal feelings or ideas through traditional artistic media. By the time he left Akron and headed west in 1996, he had already abandoned the idea of conveying intimate ideas through art. After working temporarily for the Olympics in Salt Lake City, Meyer worked in a furniture store and attended a technical welding school and became a certified welder. These experiences significantly influenced his work and continue to shape the trajectory of his creative endeavors.

The Orbus exhibition shows the range of Meyer's skills and interests. Using recycled materials, he creates sculptural and functional objects that are extravagant in a way that is reminiscent of the illustrations in Dr. Seuss books. *Biker Bar* is a sculpture that functions as a bar; four bar stools made of bicycle parts are connected to a large table or bar structure that has a slick glass countertop. The clunky, complex elegance of the welded metal bike components contrasts nicely with the modern feel of the glass surface, and the stools are surprisingly comfortable and well designed. Meyer also cleverly altered bicycles, creating a bike that folds in half (presumably for quick and easy storage), and a motorized chopper that functions like the mopeds of the late 1970s.

The most "Seuss-ian" piece in the exhibition is *Black Out*, an enormous domicile-like planetarium made of black plastic sheeting. The piece, like a true planetarium, mimics stellar formations. Meyer mapped out late summer stellar formations and punched tiny holes in the ceiling to let small rays of light into the dark interior space. The planetarium, which is crammed between the back wall and two columns, "breathes" and expands, as an industrial blower pumps air into it. From the outside, it looks like a large black bubble or igloo. But upon

entering Meyer's lo-tech plastic planetarium, one can experience the night sky at any time of the day. *Black Out* is an ambitious project that, despite its rough appearance, is very well designed.

However, the best artworks in Orbus are much smaller in scale. *Shopping Cart Chaise Lounge* is a beautifully upholstered and altered shopping cart. As comfortable as it is attractive, the red chaise-shopping cart would be as at home on a catalog or web site selling stark Italian furniture as it is in a gallery. Despite the usefulness of the piece, Meyer's underlying point is that, as he says, "In this culture, the consumer is ultimately the product." Clearly we all are, to some degree, products of advertising and marketing, and of the commodities we buy and consume.

Meyer's involvement with and love of music is inherent in a series of what he has termed *Quadcut Records*. The artist carefully cuts vintage records in quarters and glues different sounds and genres of music together to create an entirely new album. As objects, they are symmetrically striking, and the sounds that they produce are serendipitously fascinating. One of the albums in the series was made by combining four records of 1950s and '60s organ music. Surprisingly, the four quarters work well together, creating, according to Meyer, "a sense or order out of chaos; it's as if the turntable needle seeks the dominate grooves on the record, which makes for a unexpectedly unified sound."

Often, unpredictability and chaos create extraordinary art. This is the formula that makes Meyer's work so intriguing. This may also be why Asterisk Gallery has been able to carry on for more than three years with little support from the art community. Taking risks is key to making and showing avant-garde art. When you take chances, you often fail, but you also succeed; Meyer's exhibition is a prime example of this principle.

CHAOS THEORY

Doug Meyer's Seussian sculpture suits gallery's risk-taking ethos

by LYZ BLY

Wednesday, July 14, 2004

http://www.newsenseonline.com/1_FT_2004_07_14.htm