

Main: Our Friends Electric Review At Asterisk Gallery

Our Friends Electric @ Asterisk Gallery 11/12

If you've ever been to Asterisk Gallery in Tremont, perhaps you noticed a certain grittiness that aptly disregards mainstream affectations of slick perfection and white cube sterility. While this can generate fertile stirrings from the underground, it can at times become cavalier and amateur. Irrespective, it is often the case that great artworks shine like beacons in the dingiest of our cultural corners. In Asterisk's current exhibition, *Our Friends Electric*, there is certainly evidence of this, and curator Daiv Whaley has assembled a commendable collection of bright artists for his show that looks at light as medium and content. Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of *Our Friends Electric*, is the diverse scope of tactics used to employ light. From a mesmerizing content-driven video projection by Kristen Baumliér to the sleek stainless steel functional lamps of Damon Drummond, Whaley's theme is well explored, and the diversity makes for a show where there is something for everyone.

Although individual pieces are hit and miss, Whaley's curation gives credibility to even the weaker works by creating an overarching sense of orchestrated unison. It is a welcome sense of design and intentionality that contrasts the oft-disheveled crudeness characteristic of the in-house productions of the Asterisk clan.

In fact, passing the curatorial leadership torch for this exhibition, Asterisk's front man Dana Depew is in the artist lineup. Although the quantity and scale of Depew's works in the show seems verbose and nepotistic, one piece called Jalopy is an easy candidate for best in show. Jutting from a center column, like a bulbous growth on an old tree, Depew has constructed an assemblage of antique containers, luggage, and boxes covered in sepia-toned memories from antique photos and negatives. Additionally, some containers have been retrofitted with voyeuristic peepholes where viewers are invited to peer into anachronistic images of disco balls and beer signs. It is an interesting reversal of part and counterpart – of past and present, where surface is nostalgic and the gaze is cast onto times more current. Here, Depew gives us the historical in broad daylight while encouraging scrutiny of things contemporary.

Also critiquing the state of current affairs is Shawn McMahon's Kids These Days. In McMahon's piece, a light box illuminates the familiar image of urban streets signs that announce, "Caution – Children at Play." Here, however, our would-be innocent child brandishes a handgun while skipping across his field of yellow bliss. Despite the pointed commentary, the image appropriation is obvious and diluted in a gallery context. Perhaps better – as I heard gallery goers positing – would be for the artists to alter various street signs in situ with vinyl stickers of handguns. Though this iteration would deal less with the literal use of light, the shedding of proverbial light onto an important social issue would certainly be more brilliant.

Jason Lee feeds us another cliché with two light boxes illuminating crisp images of green grass separated by a vertical strip of a miniature white picket fence. Titled *Greener*, Lee's work is somewhat saved by its abstract beauty and simple perfection. From afar, the glow melds together like an electrified color field painting, with even a nod to a Barnett zip. It is only on close observation that the dividing stripe is seen to be a model fence. Also, as you begin to look, it becomes obvious that the grass indeed is not greener on either side – suggesting a resistance to covetous behavior.

With so many works towing the line for either pure functionality or finely artistic objectness, Edward Raffel's *Klondike Sidewinder* offers an interesting blur between the two. Despite its application as an overhead futuristic chandelier, there is something more sculptural and suggestive in the way it implies some industrial usefulness. With the almost sci-fi appearance of a neutron accelerator, Raffel's work is both worldly and otherworldly. Though its obvious utility is the light emanating from the circular florescent tubes, it taunts us to suspect a more clandestine production within the insulated tube that passes through the ring of lights.

What Cleveland light show would be complete without an obligatory appearance by neon navarch, Jeff Chiplis? His signature style opens the show in the gallery foyer with two works in which he employs his familiar technique of juxtaposed, found neon. Of the two, *White Table* offers a welcome departure from the usual wall arrangements, as Chiplis assembles his material to construct a sculptural contoured table. The fluidity of his three-dimensional drawing is nicely contradicted by the fact that his mark-making is the readymade construction of prefabricated lines and truncated parts of other wholes.

Despite a few dim interpretations of the thesis, this exhibition marks a success for the difficult task of pulling together a thematic group show. With *Our Friends Electric*, Daiv Whaley takes his friends eclectic and does what great curators do best – use the creations of others to compose an environment that itself becomes a work of art. The exhibit runs through 12/4 at Asterisk Gallery, 2383 Professor Ave. For info call 330-304-8528. **from *Cool Cleveland* contributor Kristin Bly-Rogers**
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