

Art school, like any advanced educational experience, can be intellectually enlightening and transformative, and also emotionally stressful, especially since most art students make their way to the academy in their late teens. There's a high probability that the realm they are entering will be emotionally charged.

While this could be said about any young university student, art school is volatile because unlike engineering, science or history students, art students are often encouraged to explore themselves, along with the complex social world they inhabit. What an artist makes, what they attempt to communicate, is often extremely personal; as young artists begin pouring their hearts out on canvas, sharing their ideas with peers and professors, and engaging in frank public discussions about their work, they come to understand the vulnerable position they've placed themselves in. A smart and ambitious professor who is also sensitive and patient can make a big difference in emotionally tenuous art students' academic and personal lives. Students at the Cleveland Institute of Art have found such a teacher in Cleveland artist Terry Durst.



Unbearable joy  
Justin Reed's *Happiness*, at Asterisk  
Gallery

Durst's commitment to his students is manifest in the exhibition *that was now, this is then: work by young artists living in Cleveland*, currently on view at Asterisk Gallery in Tremont. Durst and gallery owner Dana Depew planned the exhibition of more than 30 of Durst's students' works for over a year. The resulting exhibition is impressive for the range of work represented, the proficiency of some of the young artists, and because of Durst and his students' hard work. The gallery, which is normally a standard rectangle, has been transformed, as Durst and his protégées added several walls to the space, and turned the basement into an exhibition area.

According to Durst, the title of the exhibition is based on transformation and change. "At this time in young students' lives, they are discovering things and they are changing, so I wanted the title — the theme — to reflect that," he explains. The curatorial premise is apparent throughout the show, and emerges in varying ways. Heather Quesada's four photo diptychs are based on Edgar Allen Poe's short story series *The Mystery of Marie Roget*. By photographing herself in period costumes, Quesada transformed herself into eight characters from the story. The images, which she manipulated to make them appear vintage and faded, are technically beautiful. The artist also "plays" each of the characters quite convincingly, reflecting poses and facial expressions so often found in mid-19th-century daguerreotypes. The clever antique quality of the photographs is underscored by the way they are mounted. The artist used aged, faux wood-grain cardboard for frames.

Stephanie Brown's *Lewd Home Collection* is comprised of a set of black-and-white silkscreened sheets. A plethora of text covers the bottom sheet, which includes phrases such as, "tie me up," "you make me moan," and "come on your tits," while the top sheet and pillowcases are adorned with images of a hissing, growling cat, a woman and a man copulating, as well as closeups of a woman's breasts and eyes. Appropriately, Brown had the sheets displayed on a mattress in the middle of the gallery floor. *Lewd Home Collection* is acerbically humorous, as the artist references the numerous "fill-in-the-blank" home collections available at department and discount stores.

The installations in the exhibit clearly steal the show. Tanna Tucker's *Fort* is a tent-like structure made by draping bed sheets over chairs. Inside the simple assemblage the artist

creates a childlike homage to her Vietnam veteran father; photos of Tucker as a toddler with her father are strewn about, along with toys, a Care Bears coloring book, a Pez candy dispenser, a flashlight, and her father's hat, which says "Combat Veteran Vietnam." The artist skillfully and earnestly creates a childlike niche, which also serves as a temple of respect for a man she obviously reveres.

Leanne Strickler's installation, *the courtship of Mr. and Mrs.*, is a virtual den of sensual iniquity, as the artist transformed a corner of the gallery into a glowing red room. The space is packed with ornate embroidered furniture, tables overflowing with empty beer and liquor bottles, and yards and yards of red netting and satin fabric. An oversized, gaudy red lamp from the 1970s is the focal point, yet one's olfactory receptors are also engaged, as Nag Champa incense burns unceasingly. Tucker's sense for detail extends to the auditory realm, as well, as the CD Nathaniel Merriweather presents...*Lovage: Music to Make Love to Your Old Lady By*, emanates seductively from a boom box.

All the installation artists — including Kevin Czapiewski, who created *Reading Room*, a visually compelling, sparingly furnished blue-lit room with white furniture and books, which emit a cool blue glow—are adept at constructing installations with high sensory appeal. However, not surprisingly, they lacked critical engagement with their subject matter. One wonders, for instance, how Tucker's Fort might have changed had she addressed the ways the Vietnam War emotionally shaped her father. This lack of critical engagement was also apparent in some of the two-dimensional works in the show. Anna Robertson's massive painting, *Sleep on It*, has the sentence, "My boyfriend know the inside of me better than my doctor," scrawled on it in red paint. While the piece originally had an interesting performative quality to it, as it previously hung across from University Hospital, where medical personnel walked by it daily, one hopes that someday the artist might project a more empowering message such as, "I know the inside of me better than my doctor." With teachers like Durst as her guide, that time may well come.

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by LYZ BLY

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