



Jean Patterson, *Anxious Fear Tension*, vinyl, polyfilling

## **GROUP SHOW: ASTERISK GALLERY • CLEVELAND, OHIO**

by Eric Susyne

When Anna Sui announced that her spring 2001 collection was based on her recollections of the Mudd Club, fashion followers generally breathed a sigh, as if to say either “not another revival” or “at least she’s doing the good part of the ‘80s.” “Doing the good part” is largely a remanufacturing of memories; a personal zeitgeist formed by objects and places, and often the recollection of an object within a compelling space. Like break dancing, the gallery spaces of the ‘80s and early ‘90s seem naively charming and lacking in the media-slick skin that’s now de rigeur, therefore making them desirable models for the newest generation of gallerists. My own collective *genus loci* from the past two decades has been shaped by the venues that have managed to combine a Steinean “there there” atmosphere with group presentations that were my equivalent of a fantasy dinner party. Included amongst these would be group shows at Exit Art, 303 Gallery, even certain Carnegie International Biennials.

Asterisk Gallery can be added to the above list.

The recent group show that inaugurated the gallery focuses on object-oriented art that recontextualizes the gallery’s space as a container. Featuring Mike Dee’s video installation and video still photography, Jean Patterson’s shorthand word sculptures, Robert Levine’s handcrafted objects, Bill Radawec’s paint-chip paintings, and Jason Lee’s circuit-like photographs, the show finds each artist reconfiguring a cultural or common object and presenting it within a format that either combines or refers to electronic age glamour along with the handcrafted. An obsessively intensive process seems to be the modifying factor that unites these dinner guests.

Jason Lee's photographic installation "6 of 1, Half Dozen of the Other" occupies a strategic niche in the entry to the gallery. Acting more as a maitre d' than a bouncer, the complex network of constructed metal light boxes compels with its photographic images of claymation-like cowboys and Indians. Lee has an uncanny way of humanizing the most sterile of objects; inside the gallery another circuit of light boxes focuses on images of pink and flesh toned urinal pucks. Within the structure of a mass of not-so-slick steel boxes and electrical cables, the installation calls to mind more a basement workshop than a clinical X-ray bank.

Also utilizing electronic media but focusing on the human side of cultural objectification is Mike Dee's "Trial and Tenderness." A hanging two-inch LCD color television screen plays a sped-up clip of Otis Redding performing in a manner that references the singer's alleged cocaine addiction. Beneath the monitor on the floor lies a tiny paper bra which reinforces the viewer's position as an "audience member" in the gallery. Dee's work seems intent on interrogating the cultural construction of a performer and his performance. Equally intriguing is Ringo's Ruby Ring, a close-up video still photograph of Ringo Starr's hand from A Hard Day's Night. Dee's encyclopedic knowledge of the aesthetics of music and performance saves him from becoming the party bore; like his mentor and fellow video artist Glen Seator, Dee creates manipulated images that are "stored" within the packaging of technology. His work calls to mind early Smiths album covers that capitalized on retro-appeal cultural icons through second generation reproduction.

The seduction of form and material is immediately recognizable in Los Angeles artist Jean Patterson's black vinyl anxious, fear, stress, tension. Not immediately recognizable, the title's words in shorthand configure the shape of the soft filled sculptures. Her work literally reshapes the Conceptual and often dry word art of the early '90s by transforming words into graphically fetching objects. Both the black vinyl and the pale pink Plexiglas of flower, flower recall the smooth sexiness of Modernist surfaces with the recent mainstream popularity of fetish gear; think suburban sex shop meets Mies lounge. The retro '80s associations of the words she chooses to objectify also seem quaint and pre-millennial. Concentrating entirely on the calligraphic or formal pattern in Patterson's work, though, is to overlook the comment she is making on the implications of technologically reproducing or altering language.

Both Robert Levine and Bill Radawec reinterpret common objects that are the dowdy cousins to Patterson's sexy bon mots. For some time Los Angeles based Levine has painstakingly recast objects; in this case, scattered throughout the gallery are painted, carved wood renditions of bowling pins, cans of spray paint, a brown bag, and other objects that are the antithesis of the Gucci ad/Glass House art object. At the end of the day, his objects seem less like a redux of Johns' two beer cans and more like a parody of boys' toys (the "True Value" logo is practically a gay-appropriated icon à la a California Highway Patrol badge). Radawec brings to the show his bold multi-colored panels which use the named colors from hardware shop paint-chip samples as the basis for a Conceptual color theory. Incorporating the erotic surface and form of Donald Judd's boxes but with none of the macho Minimalist angst, Radawec's re-rendering of these flat objects works surprisingly well. Radawec's act of "imagining" colors based on words

alone is as cathartic and transformative as any of the other ideas presented in this show. The placement of works within the space is particularly successful, and the roughly hewn gallery environment provides an edgy aesthetic to match the work. Bravo, Asterisk!

Eric Susyne

Cleveland, Ohio

2001

[http://www.zingmagazine.com/zing16/reviews/rev10\\_asterisk.html](http://www.zingmagazine.com/zing16/reviews/rev10_asterisk.html)