

Tangled Up in Blue

January 13, 2015 - 15:24 — bradleyrubenstein



A Tangled Web: D. Dominick Lombardi, Curator
Causey Contemporary
Through January 29, 2015

The group show is one of those things that can either be done well or becomes an exhibition overwhelmed by variety -- or worse, a clutter of objects that don't relate to each other without the benefit of lengthy wall texts. D. Dominick Lombardi, a veteran New York curator, has managed to pull together a visually interesting exhibition at Causey Contemporary, which was based on the simple premise of pairing the artists represented by the gallery with an outside artist of Lombardi's choosing whom he felt complemented the work. What results is a show that is short on theory and long on visually. He has turned the exhibit into a kind of dance, with one wondering (without looking at the cheat sheet) which artists are waltzing with each other.

To paraphrase the ninth-century Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu, it is instructive to count the stars in the night sky, but more enjoyable to merely look at them. The show leans heavily toward painting, with a significant collage aesthetic—"Tom and Betty Connect the Dots - Tapestry 2 - Contrary Mary" (2013) by Michel Dimanche, "Untitled" (2012) by Moses Hoskins, and "Infinity is Always Longer" (2013) by Melissa Murray are riffs on Rauschenberg, 80s Pattern and Decoration, and a smattering of Basquiat -- though all the

artists manage to put their own spin on these "flatbed-style" works. Lombardi's painting, "The Conjuror" (2014), updates this style. His surreal, loopy style of figuration feels much more contemporary. Dana Schutz and David Humphrey have explored similar themes, but Lombardi's more modest scale and genuine appreciation of illustrators like R. Crumb lends his work a sinister twist that remains with the viewer longer.

James St. Clair's "The Binghamton" (2013 [above]), both visually arresting and conceptually interesting, is one of the strongest paintings in the show. St. Clair combines the paint handling of Kossoff or Auerbach with the process of Avigdor Arikha and some performative art. St. Clair works off his boat on the Hudson River, creating *alla prima*, *plein air* paintings -- painterly snapshots of the effects of nature reclaiming the architecture along the river. He mixes passages of light, airy washes with thick passages of paint, visually documenting the combination of the dissolving metal and wood structures back into the river.

Of the two sculptors in the show, John J. Richardson, with "Case Study Number 28" (2013), and Arcady Kotler, with "Cube" (2013), Kotler's quirky minimalist cube comprised of steel belted tire treads [shown at right] seems stronger than Richardson's surrealist assemblage. Kotler plays on the now familiar geometry of Tony Smith of that giant black spinning cube in downtown Manhattan, turning the circular forms of the tires into a corporate-like monolith -- a monument to the waste and futility of the auto industry and a certain kind of modernism.

Rounding out the exhibition are some good examples of drawing, notably "Untitled - Blue Cups" (2014) by Jen P. Harris and photographs by John Wyatt. After viewing all the pieces, this show leaves the viewer wanting to see more by some of these artists, which, in the end, might be what the exhibition is all about. - *Bradley Rubenstein*

Causey Contemporary is at 29 Orchard Street, New York, New York 10002.

Mr. Rubenstein is a painter, story teller, and smart culture aficionado.

