

Low-Tech Art In High-Tech Era Four Artists Create One-Of-A-Kind Installations At Real Art Ways

May 22, 2006

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What do a very large war gaming table, twin beekeepers, handmade pixels and a parasitic light-stealing orb have in common? All are part of an exhibit entitled Four Solo Shows on view at Real Art Ways in Hartford through July 9.

In a fast-paced world where technology is king, the artists in this exhibit embrace the low-tech, primitive side of their work, while commenting on the technological world they inhabit. All four are part of an open call for emerging artists in New York and New England and all created site-specific, one-of-a-kind installations.

Mike Womack's "Heat Is Not Made Of Tiny Hot Things" truly lives up to its name. Womack created the original image – a modernist, abstract painting – in Photoshop, where he converted it into a "digital matrix" to plan out the color of every square. Using 4,750 handmade mirror-pixels, Womack "steals" color from painted assemblages in the periphery of the space, using a laser beam to reflect the precise color to each carefully positioned mirror. The result is an 11-foot-tall and 20-foot-wide luminescent grid resembling stained-glass windows.

Precision is key in Womack's work. Variables such as shadows had to be controlled, or the mirrors wouldn't reflect the intended colors. The viewing space also had to be limited because once the viewer enters the space the light varies, changing the color of the mirrors.

While very little in Womack's piece is happenstance, Adam Niklewicz celebrates the spontaneity of his surrealist-dreamscape, "The Ballad of the Twin Beekeepers." With bees taking center stage in everything from books ("The Secret Life of Bees") to body-care products (Burt's Bees), Niklewicz uses his family's beekeeping business to explore themes of childhood and dislocation.

A red curtain separates his piece from the rest of the space, creating his own distinct world. In one corner hangs a deep-sea diver, covered in dead bees, an object that he says symbolizes Freud's subconscious and the act of diving beneath the surface to explore one's life. The diver, which took four months to make working at three bees a minute, casts a shadow on the floor of the space, giving the feeling that the whole room is under water.

Walking into Niklewicz's work summons up an inherently ominous feeling: a watch lies under a fluorescent green bee hive, robotic papier-mâché beekeepers roam aimlessly, and the body of a dead animal slowly decomposes. But there is also humor. One of the hives is covered in bees that re-create the map of the Philippines, which is strikingly similar to the birthmark on the forehead of Mikhail Gorbachev.

Joseph Smolinski's "Transmission," like Womack's piece, comments on the relationship between technology and humans. Yet there is a darker, futuristic side to Smolinski's installation. The centerpiece is a video projection of an insect-like creature. Only later does it become clear that the video is attached to a parasitic orb, which feeds off it by stealing light from the video. Inside the orb a man and a woman are stranded, an electric tower is down and lights are flashing on and off. Is this the future of technology? Are we just tiny figures controlled by an overgrown creature? Are we constantly looking for the next energy source?

Tim Hutchings contends his "Very Large Wargame Table" is the largest wargame table in the world. And it just might be. It's a super-sized game of "Risk," with mountainous terrains and wide swaths of grass, perfect to engage in battles and conquer enemies. In fact, Hutchings' piece is an interactive sculpture, and gamers are invited to bring toy soldiers and game pieces to play. The piece is not aesthetically engaging, but the sheer size, coupled with the opportunity to see visitors crawling around and ducking for cover, is worth a visit.

"Four Solo Shows" continues through July 9 at Real Art Ways, 56 Arbor St., Hartford. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Thursday and Sunday from 2 to 9:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday, 2 to 10 p.m. Closed Mondays. Admission is \$3, free for RAW members and cinema ticketholders. Information: 860-232-1006.

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