



05/07/2009

Rece\$\$ uses art to illuminate economic collapse

by Willow Belden, qboro Editor

The exhibit isn't what you'd expect.

First, there's the location. The gallery housing Rece\$\$ is in Flushing, yet the paintings, sculpture and videos featured in the exhibit have the sharp off-beat intensity that one usually expects to find in Greenwich Village.

Then, there's the theme. The exhibit purports to be a collection of works explaining why the economy collapsed. Yet one doesn't find satirical political cartoons or blatant allusions to financial decay.

Instead, there are colorful abstract paintings, sculptures made out of cardboard boxes, miniature models of construction sites, videos of women prancing about in blue plastic and even a helicopter fashioned from a turtle-shaped sandbox.

In the center of the gallery space stands an arch composed of triangular pieces of wood which have been bent to the breaking point (literally) and are held together with mangled bolts. Then there's an interactive "drum machine," which uses a coffee cup, several miniature C-clamps, a window and a jumble of wires to produce a constant stream of metallic clinks.

At first glance, it seems unlikely that these eclectic pieces could illuminate truths behind Wall Street's collapse. But that's kind of the point, according to curator Jennifer Junkermeier.

Junkermeier said the artwork displayed in Rece\$\$ isn't meant to explain the recession in a literal sense; instead, it's supposed to cast doubt on things the general public took as fact and shed light on structural or systemic weaknesses that nobody used to see.

To explain what she meant, Junkermeier pointed to a large, angular sculpture, composed of cubes of various sizes and painted different shades of blue, gray and white. Viewed from afar, the piece looks stalwart, but when you look at it closely, you realize that the whole thing is made out of cardboard boxes.

"It's something that looks really solid and strong but isn't," Junkermeier said — kind of like the economy last year.

Junkermeier pointed out another work, which she referred to as the "suicide piece." The piece — actually entitled "It's Going to Happen" — involves a small two-wheeled contraption, with a mess of wires and batteries visible, that jerks back and forth on top of a white pillar. The gizmo, which is reminiscent of something middle school students might make for a science fair, constantly approaches the edge of the pillar, halts abruptly to avoid falling off the edge and then reverses. Every so often, a recorded voice shrieks, "It's going to happen!"

Junkermeier explained that the "suicide piece" suggests that we — individuals, society, the economy — are constantly on the brink of potential disaster, but that we don't know when exactly we're going to fall off the metaphorical cliff.

Other pieces in the exhibit examine society's preoccupation with time. One picture shows a man with his back to the viewer, facing a cloudy sky. Attached to his back is an oval-shaped mirror reflecting the same cloudy sky. Next to the man is the word "tomorrow."

The image is supposed to make the audience think about society's "constant obsession with what's coming next," Junkermeier said. "Since we're always thinking, 'The next, the next, the next,' maybe that's why we are where we are."

Slightly more blatant socioeconomic commentary comes in the form of a sculpture called "Sleep Walking," which is displayed downstairs in the building's lobby because it was too large to fit in the elevator. The sculpture depicts a man in a business suit whose proportions are monumentally askew, rendering him nearly as wide as he is tall.

"I see it as the inflated corporate suit," Junkermeier said.

Taken as a whole, she added, the exhibit is meant to show "a breakdown of structures on a bunch of different levels" — most significantly by breaking down what we know as "truths." As Junkermeier put it, the works are supposed to make viewers start "thinking about things that are monumental and permanent and wondering how permanent they really are."

Recess

When: Tues. - Sat.

11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Through May 30.

Where: Crossing Art,
136-20 38th Ave.,
4th Floor, Flushing

Tel: 212-359-4333
crossingart.com



(photos by Willow Belden)