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Twin Peaks

Two shows at Deborah Colton Gallery explore ambiguity and the unknown

By Troy Schulze

published: August 17, 2006

A work of visual art naturally possesses a mystery. Most likely, you weren't there when the artist created it, and depending on the artist, the work offers more or less information about the influence and impetus behind it. For some artists, mystery isn't merely a trapping; it's the entire point. Two shows at Deborah Colton Gallery,

"**Daniel Kayne: Urban-Mix**" and "**Teresa**

O'Connor: A Ghost Story, Part 1," exhibit work by Houston artists for whom ambiguity and the



unknown are obvious obsessions. Walking in, one is immediately struck by Daniel Kayne's large mixed-media prints, some of which resemble the cover art for New Order's *Brotherhood* album. The up-close, grainy photos of scraped and textured metal begin to take on meaning when juxtaposed with Kayne's postcard-size snapshots of graffiti art in Houston, New York and abroad. Two entire walls of prints make up Kayne's document to the unknown artist, and it's the display that makes this collection of images impressive; on their own, they'd make interesting, artsy postcards -- or trading cards. (Right! Graffiti Artist Cards! "I'll trade you a Give Up for a Banksy.")

Courtesy of Deborah Colton Gallery



Has anything "happened" between The Forty Something Male Singer and The Lounge Act?

Where:

Deborah Colton Gallery, 2500
Summer, 713-864-2364.

Details:

Through August 31.

Subject(s):

["Daniel Kayne: Urban-Mix"](#), ["Teresa O'Connor: A Ghost Story, Part 1"](#)

Seriously, though, Kayne is an artist to watch. "Urban-Mix" reveals his keen eye for documenting urban nature, especially things that become part of the city landscape while nobody is watching. To notice these details and wonder about how they got there, Kayne seems to be saying, is to follow a ghost, to peer into an unknown world that can be revealed only by the ghost itself, and that revelation isn't likely.

The conceit gets literal, moody and dark in Teresa O'Connor's unsettling show "A Ghost Story, Part 1." While installations sometimes represent environments that have seen trauma or that create the presence of human characters through strewn clothing, furniture tossed at odd angles and letters left behind, O'Connor has gone beyond that. Through video stations

throughout the two rooms utilized by O'Connor, we're introduced to the characters: a woman called The Lounge Act and a man referred to as The Forty Something Male Singer. We're led to believe these two are in a relationship, though we're supposed to plug in the details. But then again, maybe they haven't even met yet. O'Connor's meticulous placing of vintage furniture, clothing, bric-a-brac and up-to-date technology doesn't naturally suggest that anything has necessarily "happened."

O'Connor drives this home in a brilliant move. A hardcover edition of Elia Kazan's *The Understudy* lies open on the floor, flanked by two vintage Westinghouse oscillating fans, which blow the pages of the book back and forth. Reading the words is essentially impossible. The eye catches snippets of dialogue: "I would have puked but I saw Oscar drawing a pistol out of a holster"; "I'd like to taste a Bonne Nouvelle"; "I felt the nausea again." It's easy to abandon the task of reading, and O'Connor seems to be emphasizing that very thing. Abandon all hope of understanding. Time flows both forward and backward here. Who knows, this place could be the control room where some nefarious being decides and adjusts the fates of unsuspecting men and women. At any moment, a character from an alternate reality may spontaneously materialize in the space.

There are wonderful touches everywhere. At one particular video station, a portable DVD player has been mounted on the wall at exactly the position where the gallery's natural light casts the viewer's shadow, framing the tiny screen inside the viewer's torso. A glass and a coffee cup contain sticky residues of the liquids they once held. Abstract video of a crow repeats on screens throughout the space. A pink heart-shaped tray containing what look like half-eaten chocolates lies next to an ashtray choked with gold-tipped butts. A wall-mounted flat-screen TV displays photographs of the couple in question.

An eerie tone fills the room, too, like an insistent droning, which is both repellent and oddly narcotic - like a David Lynch film. In fact, experiencing O'Connor's bizarre realm must be what it's like to be in a Lynch movie, not as a performer or a crew member, but actually in the movie. She seems to pay homage to Lynch in a video loop of people dancing, or lightly swaying, to an unheard rhythm. O'Connor evokes the mystery, humor and terror of Lynch's work in the unpredictability of her choices.

Then again, "A Ghost Story, Part 1" is an art installation, filled with video loops and electronic gadgets that repeat their patterns all day long. It gets turned on in the morning and turned off at night. If one really took the time to let this piece work on him, the symbols would start to click, and the story would come together, the whole non-narrative. Thankfully, O'Connor's smart. She designed the piece to prevent anyone from ever finding out the truth. One thing's for sure, though: After spending less than a half-hour in O'Connor's weird world, *Mulholland Drive* makes perfect sense.