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REVIEW

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Young Artists at Opie Gallery

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What The Fuck
Opie Gallery
Leedy-Vouklos Art Center
April 1-30, 2005

What The Fuck, a group show curated by Lisa Kettlewell, presented a massive bouquet of young artists to the delicate wrist of the Leedy-Vouklos Art Center's Opie Gallery April 1st-30th. Kettlewell's "tossing aside of the traditional means of object making" resulted in a collage of bright, intelligent ideas fighting for attention. *WTF* attempted, in its statement, to "force the viewer to address objects multilaterally..." concentrate on the idea that the manufacturing of art objects requires several parts to produce and focus on images and objects built out of an organized assemblage of parts and pieces that only function entirely as a whole." Curating a variety of work in various media amalgamating into a greater whole is an incredible feat. Nineteen artists showing multiple pieces resulted in an opposite equation. Though Kettlewell's title, *What the Fuck*, was casual and open, her hope for the show was relatively formal. Her choices for the pieces to her puzzle were ironic and smart but literally and figuratively cramped. The Opie had become a prom where the wallflowers were stars.

WTF's price list was posted on a poorly xeroxed architectural print-out casually stuck to a harder surface and cut out together with scissors. Kettlewell took it from a shelf against the entrance and placed it in my keep as we spoke about the show. Most of the names of the works were a testament to a trendy jack-ass mentality that crutches a banality that is neither nostalgic nor interesting. I will speak further of these pieces, many of them favorably, but most of the titles read together in a contemptuous and sardonic mush; *one of these fabrics cost \$80 a yard*, *L8R Dude*, *The BEST thing in this show*, *half-ass video*, *CHICK LAIG FOR TANK*, *West Coast Wet Dream (The Love Struggle of Captain Oats and Princess Sparkle)*, *Who Cares?*, and *friendly the squirrel dressed as courtney love*, *the GENIOUS behind "live through this"*, *the soundtrack to little friendly's life*.

Kelly Gazlay's *A Golden Spider Coming Down From the Rainbow to Kiss*, 2005, acted as the centerpiece to the Opie space. A large fabric rainbow in garish colors hung from the ceiling over two huge, well-crafted stuffed spiders. A cross between Greek mythology and Rainbow Bright, the sculpture played out a simple accessible narrative with the charm of props from a school play. Gazlay's wall piece, *one of these fabrics cost \$80 a yard*, an installation surface of same-sized rounded squares in small vignettes of color and material, proved more interesting and ornate. Reminiscent of Rachel Hayes' larger fiber installations, Gazlay employs a hobbyish hand to push her material forward.

Cursing the Gladiator, an amazing collaboration by Eve Englezos and Joshua Moutray, hung tucked around a corner on the wall. Wonderfully respectful to Kettlewell's curatorial statement, elegant on its own, and quietly incredible, *Cursing the Gladiator* provided air in an otherwise chaos-cramped environment. A print of two male figures sit in chairs at three-quarter profile with text opposing each side of their heads. The boys are simply executed and well-dressed. Their mouths are closed, but the placement of the text and an illustrated line implies they are speaking or thinking the words above them. The text over the boy on the left reads "KILL, DESTROY, WOUND. IN THIS HOUR, BIND HIS FEET, HIS LIMBS, HIS SENSE, HIS MARROW SO THAT HE MAY SLAY NEITHER BEAR NOR BULL WITH SINGLE BLOWS, NOR SLAY THEM WITH DOUBLE

Above:
Kelly Gazlay,
*A Golden
Spider Coming
Down From
the Rainbow
to Kiss*, 2005,
mixed media
installation,
dimensions
variable;
Below:
What the Fuck
installation
view, 2005.



AND TRIPLE BLOWS. IN THE NAME OF THE LIVING IMPOTENT GOD, MAY YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS TASK. NOW, NOW, QUICKLY, QUICKLY, LET THE BEAR SMASH AND WOUND HIM." The boy on the right repeats this statement in Latin. His text is shorter and the oddity of the language makes the intensity of the instructions both more passive and violent. The white of the paper leaves space for the viewer to establish the boys' age, color, ethnicity, and time period. Englezos and Moutray have collaborated for a number of years, and the duo has produced a folio of interesting scenarios. *Cursing the Gladiator's* pared down imagery and well-edited text results in a fabulous piece of art.

A number of tricksters have busied their hands for the *WTF* family. Erika Hanson's *Oh, Bruce*, a digital image of Bruce Springsteen produced by a commercial blanket company, is a novel idea but fails as a relative contribution. Alex Schubert's well-rendered layers of hand-drawn digital imagery over digital imagery is modernistic and ironic. More of Schubert's work in one place and a richer scope of imagery would be more effective. Paula Nagy's *Wet n' Wild* pays tribute to Janine Antoni, kissing out a color scape in cheap colored wax on two canvas panels. The process, and perhaps the resulting image, would have been more interesting directly on the wall. The end images are too easy and simple as "paintings." Far more beautiful and successful are Jasmin Zalaya and Hadley Johnson's use of material. Zalaya's delicate embroidery of birds and blossoms in pinks and browns on fabric contrasts in its placement with Johnson's *First Loser: all the runners up to the Miss America pageant since 1921*, a blue gown on a dress form. Slightly out of place in the room but applicable to the self-effacing show title, *First Loser* bends and twists with layers of machine embroidered script. Female names, body measurements, and years give testament to the #1 contestants too ugly to stay. As American media reverses its reality contests and pedestals the worst performer as an eccentric star, *First Loser* gives testament to the apathetic hopefuls.

Lisa Kettlewell's promenade of young idols is a loud, messy show of varied talents on a tiny stage. Repeat this show in a bigger space in five years. A critical guess at the progress of these artists would simply restate my projected aesthetic. Most mothers think their child is beautiful, but sometimes ugly ducklings become ugly ducks.



Above:
Rachel Helm,
Powerful Power,
2005, wall instal-
lation, dimen-
sions variable;
Below:
Alex Schubert,
The BEST thing
in this show,
2005, laminated
mixed media on
paper.

