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Double Take: New Art Show highlights Familiar Incongruity

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BY JANIE ROSMAN



“Reciprocal Ladder to Climb” by Steve Rossi

When two separate and recognizable objects — human hair and brooms, silverware and a rake — are combined into one, sometimes artistic alchemy occurs and a new unique concept emerges.

“**Beautiful Nonsense: The Absurd Object**,” a collection of such works curated by artist Norm Magnusson of Rhinebeck, opened at Rockland Center for the Arts last Saturday. The show features numerous artists, each whose works play tricks on how we perceive familiar objects by adding to — or taking away from — them to create their new reality.

Installations varied from Christ Victor’s reductive “Milk Crate” to Eleanor White’s inclusions (pins added to objects) to Karlos Carcamo’s sculpture created from popular ethnic vinyl records and Jared Handelsman’s Truck

RoCA was standing room only, and despite arctic temperatures the crowd included guests from as far away as Beacon and Kingston, New York. “The parking lot was packed, and cars were parked in the street,” RoCA artistic director said.

Earlier this week I saw the exhibit, which included “Reciprocal Ladder to Roll” showing artist Steve Rossi (<http://www.steverossisculpture.com/>) rolling a giant orange ladder across 14th Street from Avenue C to 11th Avenue.

“People would give me nods on their way to work,” Rossi said of his cross-town adventure. “The circular ladder represents progress as a reciprocal process. Bringing curves into the visual in unstable and precarious forms produced social and psychological implications and that instability can relate to anything.”

While working on roofs years ago his daughter, now 7, watched and then began drawing him on the ladder, which sparked his idea to create this art form. “I looked at ladders as metaphors as a social norm, as in ladder of success,” Rossi said.

Different possibilities exist for visuals and color combinations as with two ladders that are positioned next to each other. To signify “climbing up the ladder” and “stopping at a certain point” the opposing color stops at a certain point in one ladder and begins at that same point in the other ladder.

RoCA two front rooms contain artist Kevin Paulsen’s “Outskirts” — a charcoal and spray paint depiction of man’s abandonment of place — and “Winter Theorems.” Doris curated two earlier shows featuring Paulsen’s work — in 2005 and in 2014 — and described culling through 500 pieces to curate the show.



“Winter Theorems” by Kevin Paulsen

“My narrative is a byproduct of how I’m working by limiting means with compressed charcoal,” Paulsen (<http://www.kevinmpaulsen.com/>) explained about how the images he draws are dictated by the way he uses charcoal and other materials.

“There was a good response to Kevin’s work,” curator Kate Doris said of the pieces she selected for him. “The objects themselves are whimsical, and some make you think.”

One group of 52 untitled drawings called “Virgil’s Crossing (The Blood of the King)” — loosely based upon Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, which he was reading at the time — was foxed (created on paper steeped).

Mops with brushes made from human hair, a toothbrush with bristles of hair, rakes whose tines are utensils and a dustpan covered with steel wool encompass surrealistic ideas created by artist Joy Taylor (<http://www.joytaylorart.com/>).

Once I started thinking about tools and how they’re useful and what they would be like if they were made not useful, it became a source for artwork. When you mix materials and ideas from two different worlds and put them together they create a new identity that retains sources of both individual components, she said. “It takes on a ghostly or other-world presence and become an amalgamated object.”

“The things we use are metaphors for things that are hidden,” Taylor said. “Either they are used in dream sources or are sexual innuendos. There’s a long history of that (metaphors and symbolism) in art and sculpture-making.”

She was making works with mundane everyday-use objects, especially ones women use — shoes, articles of clothing. “One day I looked at my paint brush, and thought, ‘What if it was hair?’ she said.

Those who view “Coven,” Taylor’s broom-with-human-hair installation, may perceive its humanoid characteristic. The hair is natural, undyed human hair purchased from wig makers and fitted by hand into brooms and brushes.

“While it can be seen as a modern suit of armor (because) it has an aggressive quality, I see it more like a porcupine, sort of furry and soft,” artist Eleanor White (<http://eleanorwhitestudio.com/home.html>) said of the pinstripe suit whose stripes she accented with pins. “I also see it as energy, aura and a halo.

White said at the time she was interested in Medieval objects and armor — a hairshirt with rope on the inside of an Oxford shirt. From this series also came “Pink Pin Gloves,” which are leather elbow-length gloves covered with pins.



“A Concrete Movement (Jungle Groove)” by Karlos Carcamo



“Fork Rake” by Joy Taylor

From afar the pins looked like hair, giving the installation a soft quality. Running one’s hand down them, however, is a different experience. “I really like the beauty of it yet it has an edgy quality,” she said.

With sculpture is her main art form, White draws with playing cards, eggshells and ash “using unorthodox materials in a push-pull theme that pushes you away while pulling you in.”

“Beautiful Nonsense: The Absurd Object” runs through April 3. For information call 845-358-0877 or email info@rocklandartcenter.org.

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