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***Tuesday, August 24, 2004***

### **Academy 2004 at Conner Contemporary Art**

Over the weekend I had the opportunity to take in the current show, [Academy 2004](#), at [Conner Contemporary Art](#) in Washington, DC. Academy 2004 is an exhibition of works by recent graduates of academic art programs in the Washington-Baltimore area. Art history professor Jamie L. Smith, curator of the show, has assembled a fantastic show. I must admit, I was quite surprised by the quality of the work in this show. The Washington Post (Glenn Dixon) had the following to say about the show:

Like any summertime grab bag, Conner Contemporary's survey of work by local art grads is hit-or-miss. The scruffy portraiture of J. Jordan Bruns and the fluorescent-lit interiors of Matt Klos will gratify only mossbacks who feared the academy had stopped teaching academic painting. But video artist Annie Schap steals the show. In "Say It With Feeling," she stabs a can of Miller and effortfully sucks the beer out of the side of the can, capping her performance with a burped "I love you" that blurs the line between emotional and physical stress. "Love Hurts Hands," in which Nazareth's deathless power ballad is spelled out line by line across the artist's knuckles, biker-tattoo-style, is the best music video I've seen in five years. It analyzes the cynical, seductive language of pop in a way that only reinforces its hold on the imagination.

The Washington City Paper (Louis Jacobson) chimes in with the following:

For the fourth straight summer, Conner Contemporary Art has turned over its gallery during the dog days of August to recent art-school grads, this time featuring 13 artists from eight local degree programs. Matthew Klos and J. Jordan Burns paint what they know: for Klos, the sinks and cabinets of a gray, fluorescent-lit studio; for Burns, eight people who are - or at least pass for - fellow art students. Terri Thomas offers a garnish but technically accomplished variation on the famous Annie Leibovitz photograph of John and Yoko, limned in eye-popping, solarized green, pink, and blue. Stephen Pauley also harks back to the 80's with his update of graffiti art, here moving an entire wall of a bathroom stall, rather than just the scrawls, into the gallery space. Julee Holcombe's two large digital prints are standouts. Babel Revisited (pictured), a takeoff on Pieter Bruegel the Elder's famous depiction of the biblical tower, seamlessly combines images of soaring skyscrapers with ugly industrial wastelands (including Georgetown's Whitehurst Freeway). Holcombe's Allegory of Vanity seats a man and a woman at a long dining table piled with symbols of life and death; while the objects (candles, fruit, skulls) come from Symbolology 101, but the work's darkly polished, Rembrandtesque panorama is eerily effective. But the most memorable pieces are Annie Schap's loop videos of a young woman trying to belch "I love you" after chugging a can of beer, and another of an anonymous figure spelling out the lyrics to the Nazareth

song "Love Hurts" on its knuckles. More than anything it's memorable if only because you won't be able to get the blasted song out of your head.



*Copyright - Annie Schap, Courtesy of Conner Contemporary Art*

Dixon nails it... Annie Schap (image above) indeed steals the show. Her video piece, "Love Hurts Hands" is awesome. It's funny, creative, simple and striking. It calls to all of us who have heard that song hundreds of times in our lifetime. The corny song combined with the corny knuckle tattoos, is nothing if not entertaining. I must have watched the video a half dozen times. And it got better and better each time. As for "Saying it With Feeling," this piece wasn't as successful for me. Perhaps it has been a while since Dixon attended college, but just three years ago, when I was in school, this scene wasn't so uncommon. Girls... guys... plenty of people shotgunned beers in school and burped any number of words. True, it wasn't videotaped and put in a gallery setting, but for me, it was nothing shocking or new. And it did appear that she struggled to down the beer. So unless she was "acting," it is my recommendation that she buy a case of her favorite light beer and start practicing. She could easily drop a few seconds off her time!!



*Copyright - Julee Holcombe, Courtesy of Conner Contemporary Art*

Julee Holcombe's "Babel Revisited" was my next favorite piece in the show. I liked this piece so much that I am willing to accept donations from my readership to help finance the purchase of the piece. The sticker price is \$3,000 so let the money start flowing!! The piece amazed me. I probably spent as much time in front of this work as watching Schap's video. I feel like I could view "Babel Revisited" for the next 12 months and still not see all that there is to see. It's a fascinating construction. I'm in awe.

Stephen Pauley also impressed me with his graffiti art. He has installed a stone bathroom wall that is covered in graffiti. I think what caught my eye is how the graffiti is "drawn" on the stone. From a distance it appears to be by black marker. Upon closer inspection though you see that the graffiti is carved into the stone. And it is done quite delicately too. To me this speaks to the "art" of graffiti art. A lot of graffiti art is very well drawn, obviously by a careful, if untrained hand. Stone carving is just as, if not more, delicate. I enjoyed Pauley's juxtaposition a great deal.

The "mossback" paintings of Bruns and Klos didn't do a great deal for me. I'm sure they are well-executed but they didn't keep my attention.

The rest of the work entertained me to a degree but were not showstoppers. I regret getting to this show so late in its run - it closes Saturday, August 28. Don't wait any longer to see this exhibition... it should give the DC metro area hope for the future of contemporary art in this city. Let's hope the artists don't run off in search of greener pastures. By the number of red dots I saw on the walls, it looks like the city is welcoming these artists with open arms.

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