

Name game

Bodies and urns at Eyedrum

What's in a name? Why, everything. Especially when it comes to contemporary art, where otherwise indecipherable work may become, well, slightly less abstruse. But even nomenclature (for example, the word "abstruse") can throw the innocent viewer. Curators, critics and conceptual artists love a well-wrought phrase. So what of a "well-wrought urn"? That phrase describes one part of Eyedrum's current juried show, *Something Not Quite Completely Different: Tradition, Innovation and Their Uncanny Discontents*. Impossibly, it's all there — the full

visual arts

spectrum of artmaking possibilities held together by a string of words.

The spell-weaver, or culprit as the case may be, is juror Jerry Cullum, senior editor for *Art Papers*. He swept more than 30 artists into the exhibit, and certain ones among them merge surprising insights with visual pleasures. There is a purposeful uncertainty in the display; the viewer is left to determine whether a particular piece fits the rubric of "Unaccountable Bodies: Pleasure, Pain, Personality and Political Incorrectness," or "Jars, Paintings and Well-Wrought Urns: A Second Look at Rules of Making." From the outset, a visit to the exhibit becomes a sort of treasure hunt.

Starting downstairs, it seems obvious that Reina Carillo's quiet vessel falls into the urn category, but its title, "Hitting Bottom," pushes the viewer to consider the vessel's metaphoric possibilities. Pinned across a wall in the next room is "Carte de Vista," JRF's grid of rectangles. The monotone tan, cream, white and black shapes are the size of postcards, their pictures gone blank like so much memory. Curling edges, small tears and folds, a blotch or ruffle are the only remnants of recollection in view.

The approach to Lisa Alembik's "Memory Series: Penumbra" is somewhat of an obstacle course, taking the viewer across a plywood bridge and past a string of dark green lights that illuminate the cellar's exposed plumbing. Alembik continues to pursue her obsession with the muck and slime of our primeval selves. In the darkest, creepiest recess, she suspends boney fish heads above a murky fountain that bubbles up through a mound of black stones. Just outside the chamber hang more unpleasant dried fishheads and varnished distortions of a rubber glove and wire screen shaped as a fish.

Upstairs, a contemporary rite of passage is tied to Kim Gaul's "Trail Markings," the visual account of a girl becoming a woman. The markers are odd squares of wood attached to iron rods varying in height from 2 feet to 8 feet. Leaning against the wall, the abstract journal looks at first to be just another quickly assembled conceptual art piece. On closer inspection, the bits of whatnot coating the markers begin to tell a story. Caught up in the flotsam are a string from a tampon, a doll's arm in a plaster cast, a broken egg, a tiny pink pill, a blood clot of paint and words like "don't eat ... beautiful ... untouched reality."

Nicolas Frazer's anomalous diary visualizes another personal experience. "164 Days" is a 7-foot-tall curved column. Dark red at its full height, its elephant-skin sur-

face smoothes as it drops to the floor, shifting texturally and visually to a smooth stream of dates. A short wall text beside the work recounts that as an infant, Frazer spent 164 days with his father. His thought-provoking work reveals how forgetting is like the healing process; the building up of scar tissue may bury pleasure as well as the pain under layers of days/skin.

Beautiful bodies are captured in "Origin. Courb.You," Steve Pomberg's photo diptych. On the left, orbs of sensual orange jellyfish trail their threads in bright blue water. The landscape of a female body stretches out on the right where a triangle of curling tendrils lies in the valley of a smooth, white-skinned crotch. Like the ocean, Pomberg seems to say, woman is a fathomless wonder.

Focused thinking and artmaking are common threads connecting all these works, but don't expect a trip through *Something Not Quite Completely Different* to meet formalist expectations. The show is more like an exploration of how, in the words of Cullum, "Funk, punk and principled grunginess have intervened since the days of classical certainties." ♦

Something Not Quite Completely Different runs through June 20 at Eyedrum, 253 Trinity Ave. Open Wed. and Sat. from 9 p.m.-midnight and by appointment. 404-581-0961 or 404-687-0913. www.pd.org/~zeug/EYEDRUM/eyedrum-sched.html