



Charlotte Street Foundation • 2005

Callyann Casteel

Max Key

Miles Neidinger

Craig Subler

Sean Ward

Nov. 6 – Dec. 20, 2005

Johnson County Community College • Gallery of Art

With the Charlotte Street Foundation awards, the idea that Kansas City artists are increasingly breaking new ground with their work and worthy of recognition becomes less of a local mantra and more of an established cultural truth. The funding buys award recipients time and materials to pursue new ideas, and the out-of-town panelists who weigh in on selecting award winners offer an objective vote of confidence that lingers as a note-to-self about why Kansas City artists should be on their short lists for future shows and events. In this year's round of award winners, performance mingles with visual aesthetics. Established artists explore innovative directions after years of success while emerging ones take flight. It is an exciting, engaging mix that ensures an interesting future for Kansas City.

Craig Subler

In past years, Craig Subler's fascination with fabricated spaces emerged in images of Italian gardens and miniature greenhouses. With his latest series of small drawings and paintings, he turns his attention to the interior landscape of the museum, a realm where the blatant commercialism of gift shops encroaches on the high-brow beauty of fine art, and visitors are depicted as everything from diffident bystanders to dutiful onlookers. Subliminal art historical references (for example, the nude woman reminiscent of Paola Veronese's *The Allegory of Love: Unfaithfulness* who appears in the corner of one of Subler's sketches) are thrown together with pointedly generic-looking sculptures and amorphous cartoon creatures, creating a garage-sale assemblage that lacks any kind of cultural hierarchy or narrative.

Subler also evokes interesting questions about the museum experience with tongue-in-cheek details. In many of his drawings, visitors are featured wearing large shapeless dots, a caricature of the little buttons people pin to their shirts while wandering through museum galleries. Figures also sometimes stare blankly into space or face a different direction from the art on display, visual cues that make the actual viewers of Subler's own works self-conscious of their interaction with his imagery, and contemplative of the growing disconnect between people and art. The presence of exoticism in the form of a giant African head and the one-size-fits-all art appreciation of postcards for sale in the ever-present gift shop add to Subler's commentary on the perplexity of the museum experience and the visitor's sense of cultural literacy.

Subler compiles these multi-layered collages from his own lifelong observations of the museum as muse, including 22 years as the director of the University of Missouri-Kansas City Gallery of Art. His works, like their content, possess a random patchwork physicality: look closely at the postcards and vases in *Shop/Museum* and *Shop/Museum #2* and you'll find lovingly created, exquisite detail, made possible by individual drawings being cut out and pasted into the paintings.

Max Key

Like Subler, Max Key also mines his professional identity and history for insights about our ability to handle massive amounts of imagery. A decorative painter who spends serious time contemplating the interiors of countless homes, Key creates wall-size paintings of feral,



Sean Ward, *Portrait Painting #1*, 2003, oil on canvas, dimensions 102.25" x 71.25", courtesy private collection



Max Key, *Pistol Thieves*, 2004, oil on canvas, dimensions 6' x 12', courtesy of the artist

fleshy plant-like formations that sprout out of old-fashioned wallpaper patterns and architectural elements, often adorned with glowing globes or twinkling cityscape-like lights. Gaudy metallic accents and sexual imagery, such as the phallic, multi-colored cattails in *Prune and Spoon* and the breast-shaped scaling and entwined pink and blue limbs of *What Happens in Heaven Stays in Heaven*, create a seedy, overdone Vegas glitz that is both hypnotic and disturbing. At certain moments, particularly in *Prune and Spoon*, the suggestive shapes and colors of Key's plant life seem to shed light on the complexity of intimate relationships and their touch-and-go fragility, germinated in the flashy fertility of city nightlife.

His prolific flora also sometimes share the spotlight with some pretty heady Biblical imagery: bitten apples, bleeding fruit and doves. To the outside observer, these loaded symbols suggest a criticism of the oversimplified system of good and evil in the Christian faith that invades our gardens of cultural and political thought with a pervasive subtlety. The idea of old designs from the 1970s mutating into a leafy carnival of light and color also hints more generally at the surprising truths that sometimes take seed in the most tacit, everyday settings of our lives, the perennial past that ceaselessly pushes through our carefully constructed present.

Callyann Casteel

Callyann Casteel shares Key's passion for patterns, but in her hands, those patterns become towering, floppy creature costumes designed and worn for public performances. Casteel, who first gained notoriety for her giant hamburgers and calculators that danced for amused onlookers at gallery openings and in parks, now seems to be focusing her skills on creating more abstract works. Her latest creations are a celebration of excessive patterning – bulky chains that epitomize “bling” (a term that refers to status symbol jewelry), spike-like horns, and other decorative elements in a hodgepodge of colors and fabrics. Born from Casteel's delicate sketches and love for fashion, these large,

column-like assemblages reflect our infatuation with the possibilities of adornment and accessorizing: the person wearing Casteel's works can create endless combinations with the stacked layers and exaggerated styles.

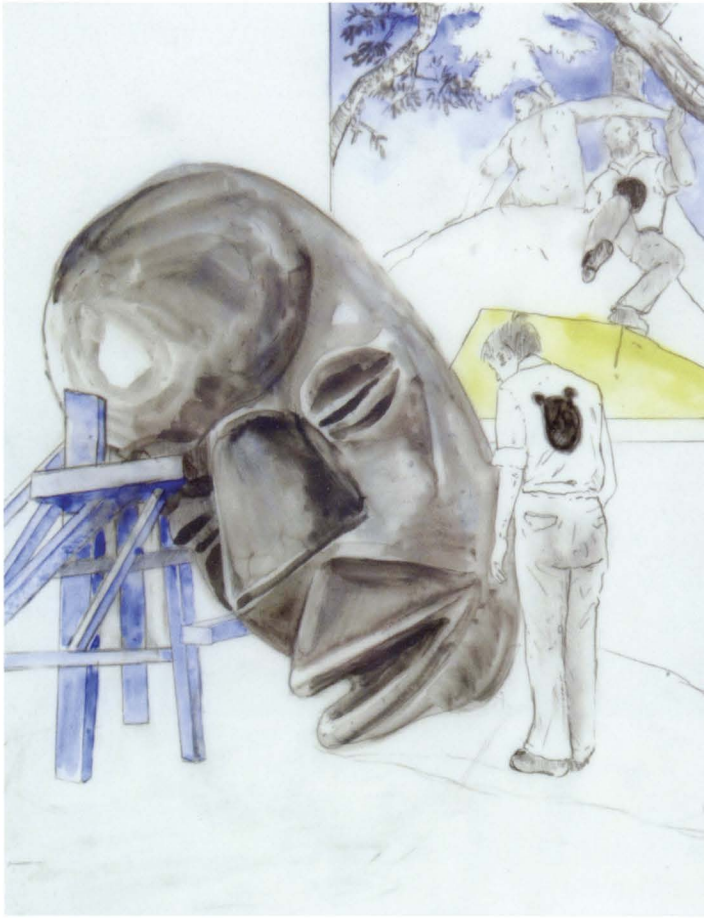
The public presence of Casteel's creatures in communal spaces also derails any attempts to keep art inaccessible and esoteric, reserved only for gallery insiders and art history nerds. It is worth noting, however, that her creations completely cover up the individual inside, creating a protective shield of posturing and fashionista flaunting.

Various influences inspire Casteel's work: children's puppetry, Matthew Barney, Quintron and Miss Pussycat (a musical group in New Orleans whose members wear outrageous outfits and perform with puppets). But what stands out in her particular art is something more akin to the Hopi Indians' way of explaining their katchina dances: when dancers put on their masks and leg adornments, the garments are never identified as or referred to as “costumes”; once they begin dancing, tribe members simply become the kachinas in body and spirit, and invite good fortune into their lives and that of their communities.

Sean Ward

Sean Ward's imagination is an arcade of noise, color, and endless ideas chasing each other down and beating each other into submission. In the past, his hyperreal sensibilities have run the gamut of everything from performance art involving several guys humping a giant foam head to Cabbage-Patch-like monsters made out of pantyhose to a faux volcano that smoked out a gallery opening. Now he's trying to buckle down that energy on canvas with sublimely freakish portraits and interior landscapes that wrestle between formal aesthetic beauty and horror movie madness.

His interest in the grotesque is more of a love of its limitless creative potential than a testosterone-fueled fascination. “I like what horror allows the figure to do ... you can rip the arm off and put it somewhere completely different, disfigure the body,” he explained.



Craig Subler, *Museum #7*, 2004, pencil and gouache on vellum, dimensions 10" x 7.75", courtesy of the artist

Ward is also interested in showing viewers that the world is flooded with startling imagery and ideas found in everyday advertising: junk mail inserts, store catalogs, product packaging. "There's some kick-ass stuff in that trash," he once said.

For example, in *Portraits 3 & 4* Ward excerpts a tiny picture from the package of a Halloween mask purchased at K-mart and glorifies it on a huge canvas with roaring detail. The result is a magnificent rock-star zombie reminiscent of the character Sloth from the 1980s movie *Goonies*. It is this type of content that epitomizes Ward's work: funny, intriguing, and gratuitous all at the same time, electrified by color, depth and form. In *Apparent Monster Hands*, another image borrowed from a Halloween costume, scaly green hands exude flesh-colored fingertips, suggesting a human presence growing out of dimestore ugliness, an attempt to grasp what we normally cast off as temporary or unattractive and somehow make it useful.

With his unabashed love of accessible, disposable imagery and visual landfill, Ward proves that you can never run out of ideas because they exist in the very fabric that makes up our daily cultural landscapes.

Miles Neidinger

Neidinger shares Ward's skill for making the mundane arresting. A married father of two who works during the day as an electrician's apprentice, Neidinger's daily life is seemingly steeped in American



Callyann Casteel, *Backwater Nasties #1*, 2005, soft sculpture, approximate dimensions 8' x 50", courtesy of the artist

ordinariness. In his job, he studies blueprints of cookie-cutter housing developments. He lives in a townhome where his studio shares space with the laundry machines in the basement. Yet it is a potent setting for mind-boggling work that revolutionizes the functionality and visual perception of everyday objects.

Neidinger considers the way we categorize and assign meaning to the daily stuff that drifts in and out of our lives, and then he incorporates intelligent appropriations of objects and their industrial designs into graceful, otherworldly installations. In his past works, his nimble precision turned coat hangers from Wal-mart into smooth, spiraling tunnels that seductively curved around walls. Coffee stirrers were transformed into remarkable symphonies of color solidified into touchable, pleasing lines. Now he takes another generic item – aluminum foil – and uses it as a sculptural material that draws remarkable shapes and forms into architectural space, breaking open the complacency of an interior with a reality-bending mindscape. The physicality of his work resides with sculpture, but its aesthetic feels more like drawing. It is a creative act that is nothing short of astonishing.

— Becca Ramspott, independent arts writer, Kansas City, Mo.

Cover: Miles Neidinger, *Maelstrom of Reflections*, 2005, aluminum foil, thumbtacks, installation dimensions 12' x 25' x 15', courtesy of the artist

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The Charlotte Street Foundation

The Mission

The mission of the Charlotte Street Foundation is to support and recognize outstanding visual artists in Kansas City. The visual arts represent a tremendous cultural strength in Kansas City, and the city benefits from the many artists who choose to live in the area. At a time when awards for individual artists have been eliminated by federal and state agencies, the need for such an effort is particularly warranted. Awards from the foundation are for recognition of outstanding work and represent a small thank you to each artist for his or her creativity and hard work. The name is derived from the Charlotte Street Mission, the former home of John Puscheck - artist, chef, agent provocateur - for the generosity and community he fostered over several decades in midtown Kansas City. John passed away unexpectedly in 2005. We miss him dearly.

Awards

Cash awards are for the unrestricted use of the artist. They will be granted annually to artists living in the greater Kansas City area who are actively creating work – based solely on the merits of their work, in the judgment of the curatorial advisors to the foundation. No applications are accepted.

Administration / Contributions

The Charlotte Street Foundation is a 501(c)3 and a component fund of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation. Contributions are tax-deductible and may be sent to Box 10263, Kansas City, Missouri 64171.

www.charlottestreet.org

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