

LARGER SIGNS, COMMUNITY SIGNING

By Jeremy Mikolajczak March 23, 2010
review on line <http://ereview.org>

A review of the 2009 Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artist Awards exhibition



Andrzej Zielinski, installation view of "Satellite Re-entry," mixed media on panel, 120" x 126", 2009, of his works in the 2009 Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artist Awards exhibition, which also features Dylan Mortimer and Jaimie Warren. Photo: Sarah Kraly

H&R Block Artspace at
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In reflecting on the 2009 Charlotte Street Foundation fellows, my original intention was to discuss how the work by Dylan Mortimer, Jaimie Warren, and **Andrzej Zielinski** transcends beyond the common cliché of generalized surface terminology. Encapsulating the idea around the words “technology,” “religion,” and “community” (“obvious”), these terms frame an axiological and esoteric meaning in the creation of the work exhibited. Furthermore, assuming each artist starts at the surface, whether consciously or unconsciously, the individual bodies of work build a conceptual framework from that general starting point. Eventually I have come to the conclusion that it’s not the visual surface that makes each individual piece, it is how, through the collective exhibition, each artist’s work forms underlining associations beyond the superficial layer.

Lately I have been getting reacquainted with collective writings and essays by contemporary artists, such as Peter Halley’s *Recent Essays 1990-1996*. The essays have proved to define the pace (or lack thereof) in the way art nomenclature has transgressed in the past 20 or so years. In his essay titled “Someday You’ll Be Able To Go To a Party and Be The Only One There: Notes on Virtual Reality,” Halley writes: “The initial anonymity of the department store has developed into McDonald’s multiple choices, computer screen banding, and the Home Shopping Network. Human beings in this environment live in far greater physical isolation than in the pre-industrial or recent past. Real, face-to-face human contact has been minimalized, and when it exists, it is controlled.” In generalized terms, we are all suburban dreamers where materiality trumps authenticity, the real is lost to the virtual, and machines replace humans.



Jaimie Warren, installation view of color photographs, 30" x 40" each, from 2009. Image: photo Sarah Kraly; work courtesy of the artist and Higher Pictures

In regard to the work in the 2009 *Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artist Awards*, what is more fitting than images of a girl who commonly dresses up like a box of French fries (and the case of one photo, eats a hot dog), voluptuously large paintings of archaic technology, and spiritually driven urban signs made of commonplace materials? Are Warren, Mortimer and Zielinski tapping into the “big box” retailing of life and art practice?

As a faithful Baudrillard reader, I generally “live by” his theories on simulation and simulacra, and their implementation on perceived reality rather than reality itself. But Jean Baudrillard’s theories always fall short for me when examining the strength and verisimilitude of humankind. These three artists are representing something larger than the cultural signs and symbols they visually present. But what is not necessarily blatantly distinguishable is their commitment to community, relationships, and above all, human connection.



Jaimie Warren, "Untitled (Self Portrait, KC Royals with Hot Dog), color photograph, 30" x 40", 2009. Image: courtesy of the Artist and Higher Pictures

Warren is about as equally known around town for her photography as she is for the performance group Whoop Dee Doo, created with fellow local artist Matt Roche. Using the model of a faux public access television program, Whoop Dee Doo’s variety shows form unlikely pairings of local community groups and human-to-human relationships that extend beyond event participation. Like her work with Whoop Dee Doo, Warren’s photographs warrant the same type of unlikely pairing by presenting a “high art” context with self-portraits in everyday situations. For example, in the 2009 color photograph *Untitled (Self Portrait, KC Royals with a hot dog)*, Warren personifies her world of dualities by attending a baseball game while dressed up in a theatrical costume. This brings to fruition the signs and symbols of the post-war American pastime and contemporary consumerism, while exemplifying one’s need of individualism (decisively American).



Dylan Mortimer, installation view of "Fuck You Satan!," cardboard, glitter, Christmas lights, 75" x 135", 2009, and "God Hooks My Ass Up!," same media, 68" x 108", 2009. Photo: Sarah Kraly

For an artist like Mortimer, the strength of human connection and the commitment to community are the basics of his work and life. As a minister of the Rivercity Community Church, Mortimer preaches about the day-to-day struggle to keep faith and spirituality in commonplace conversation. His piece titled *Welcome to Church Bitches!* — made of cardboard, glitter, and lights — uses conventional kitsch signage composed of urban slang statements mixed with religious implications. Like the work of word-statement artist Lawrence Weiner, Mortimer's strength lies in the play on words and the lasting impression of them. The physicality and bright-lights of the work seem to be secondary to the conceptual message. Using effectual elements such as those used in advertising, the work sells the public in an open dialogue about faith and "street face."

How do you make a machine beautiful? For Zielinski, it's simple — reconstruct it by deconstructing the technology of design and function using the physicality and emotional weight of materials, mediums like paint, canvas, wood, and paper. Using iconic imagery from a bevy of everyday technology such as ATMs, satellites, cell phones, and fax machines, Zielinski creates works that reintroduce the human-like physicality in our relationships to machines. There are many ways in which technology mediates ways of communication, convenience and commerce and are devoid of true human interaction. Zielinski's paintings and drawings work in parallel but provide human-to-human and human-to-object interaction on a purely visual level — removing the function of the machine and reinvesting in the emotional and visceral experience of the mark and structure.



Andrzej Zielinski, "Satellite Deployed, mixed media on panel, 120" x 105", 2009. Photo: Sarah Kraly

The Charlotte Street Foundation's mission is to foster a supportive arts community that aids in continued artistic and professional development of local artists. For Warren, Mortimer, and Zielinski, the work encourages the general population to look at their everyday surroundings, make connections with their neighbors, bring spirituality back into the conversation, and find ways to look at the machine and make it flesh. Halley concludes his essay on virtual reality with a discussion of his inherent interest in the social class of the 20th century — how the dynamics of capitalism in social relations try to critique the language of other classes (or in this case, visual vs. concept), but falls short in accepting the creation of a new language out a pre-existing one. The *2009 Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artist Awards*, the work does just that. It defies the naïve visual surface and establishes a language that personifies the identity of true Kansas City artists, returning to humankind.