



speaking eye

Denver's Visual Art News

Interviews
Reviews
Listings
& More

[About](#) | [Interviews](#) | [Reviews](#) | [Listings](#) | [Letters](#) | [Submissions](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Call for Entries](#)

Space Gallery: Transferring the Urban Appeal - reviewed by Kate Levy [Previous Review](#)

Denverites seem to be anticipating the results of the city's renewal process. Art districts are emerging out of slums and downtown is in the midst of a major gentrification. The city is a fluid, living entity that artists Robin Ault, Graeme Duncan and Jason Thielke tap into and string along through their own visions. Using photographic and gel transfers, these artists address questions such as what does a city look like at the hands of (joyous) turbulent humanity, how can we relate to the city as artists, and what does urban inspiration look like?

Viewers entering Space Gallery are confronted by two differing yet complementary bodies of work produced by Ault and Thielke.

Robin Ault's miraculous series of "Field Reports" is produced by collaging newspaper, acrylic, gouache, charcoal, graphite and crayon, and then transferring images of silhouettes on top of the collage's action. His background in architecture grounds the work, and his use of the element of chance successfully abstracts the intricacies of the urban setting (i.e., small and large dynamics, population pockets, bodies in motion, patterns of light). Ault's perspective on the eclectic city has a photographic quality of looking through the steel structures toward the humanity of the city. The collage's small lines and idiosyncrasies brilliantly complement the robust steel structures, integrating the elements of the pieces into a cohesive landscape.

Circling around the room toward the back, the viewer encounters Graeme Duncan's photographic transfers layered with paint. Duncan's strong execution of the paint layering process coincides with the emotions in the photographs. The texture of the paint is very inviting and establishes a sense of depth. The emotional presence in some pieces, such as "Alexander Platz I," "Alexander Platz II," and "Terifa II produces some bone-chilling results. In these works, Duncan was highly successful in establishing atmosphere and lighting through the photographic process and the paint. "Isle de la Meujeras I, Mexico" is also worth mention, as Duncan seems to be paying serious attention to detail in the painting process and captures the "mind chatter" in the human psyche.

Duncan's work is best viewed from further away for the most emotive, grand effect. In many works of the series, as the viewer moves closer, a focal point gets lost, the negative space seems isolated from the positive space and there is no healthy medium between the sharp parts of the image and the abstracted parts. Up close, with the exception of "Platz I" and "II", the work looks sloppy. Perhaps this speaks to the sloppiness of life, but as a viewer I find little deliberateness in this element of the work.

Overall, the work is worth seeing. I encourage the viewer to spend a lot of time examining the work from afar as well as up close. The tension is night and day; this element of the work alone makes for interesting conversation.

Next, we reach Jason Thielke's series, *Inhabit, Featuring Young Dudes*. Thielke's series is by far the highlight of the show, as it probes leagues into the dynamic of the urban life. His artistic process involves the "visualization of urban renewal in Denver" and the "reversal of traditional graffiti." Furthermore, the series is an innovative study of the human figure within the realm of urban life. The work is filled with observations of structures that have been "victims of graffiti" to "[re]-glorify these buildings." From the get-go, the viewer is faced with the tension between vandalism and art, tradition and progression, human flair and structural perfection. Thielke shows no preference for any of these entities in his paintings. The depicted architecture acquires a Bauhaus flair, blending figures, clothing, entities of transportation, nature, line, chaos and imperfections to form an integral aesthetic of a city that is always in motion. An unconscious dialogue between masculinity and femininity exists within the series simply through Thielke's use of lines, adding another level of complexity to the body of work.

Ex-Brownie, perhaps the most thought-provoking piece of the series, is the simplest aesthetically. This piece quite emotively implies tension between racial identities while simultaneously touching on the beauty and violence of childhood. It also speaks to Thielke's disdain toward the military machine in which the U.S. enrolls citizens, starting with the Girl and Boy Scouts.

Transferring the *Urban Appeal* is clean, diverse and well curated. It invites viewers to interact with the work on a highly personal level on an issue that hits close to home. Be prepared to examine transformation, nature vs. technology, and the human condition in urban America through intriguing alternative mediums.

Next door to Space Gallery is the scintillating *Soke Fine Art*, which recently switched spaces with *Den Gallery* (now upstairs from *Soke*). The gallery houses the art of Justin Sean Brunelle. In addition to finished work, the viewer can feast on works in progress, with an occasional glimpse of Brunelle in action. *Abracadabra*, the current show, presents vivid interpretations of faces on canvas. The luminous work astutely taps into the human spirit and, because of his keen attention to detail and color, the viewer can tap into Brunelle's involvement with his subjects. Although they are abstracted, there is a distinct personality in each face he explores.

Brunelle, who previously lived and worked in Vail Valley, says he wasn't able to develop this body of work until he arrived in Denver, where the community of artists is more cohesive and people are more open to his ideas. It is clear that his inspiration has found him, as the paintings are instinctual and not contrived in any way. Brunelle's largest work in progress is called *The Freedom Project*, a multi-media exploration of the American perception of Freedom. Over the next few months, he will be presenting installations of the work in his gallery. Stay tuned for a more in-depth discussion of this work in June.

Space Gallery and *Soke Fine Art* are located at 765 and 757 Santa Fe Dr., respectively, in Denver. Both shows run through May 13, 2006.