

Dragon Street doings

GALLERY GOURMET: Urban development, Texas expanse and bumps of paint

Thursday, September 13, 2007



Mike Osborne at Holly Johnson Gallery

Fulbright scholar Mike Osborne has a penchant for urban development. Building on "Interchanges," photographs of city infrastructure in Texas, California, Tokyo and Taipei, his latest body of photographs focuses entirely on China.

Towers shoot upward from the ruins of old-world China as if to register the contradictions of a free-market economy within a politically communist state.

An untitled photograph in "Enter the Dragon" at Holly Johnson Gallery shows phosphorescent lines of light crisscrossing the surface of a looming gray tower. A four-story building, remains of a brick wall and carcasslike scaffolding sit listlessly in its shadow.

A radiant orb sits atop a multilegged form in one untitled image he's nicknamed "Pearl Tower." Beneath this Chinese version of the Belgian Atomium, a small bus shed glows. Absent of people, it is an urban space brimming with the potential energy of concrete, steel and glass. Another, nicknamed "Bird's Nest," displays a portion of the nestlike outer grid of the Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron's new Olympic Stadium in Beijing. It is steeped in snow. Reminiscent of Casper David Friedrich's romantic Cloister Cemetery in the Snow (1817), this fragment of modernity seems but a ruin to come.

Light, both its speed and incandescence, is the driving force here

---Charissa N. Terranova

• "Mike Osborne: Enter the Dragon," new photographs from China and Taiwan, through Oct. 13 at Holly Johnson Gallery, 1411 Dragon St. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Free. 214-369-0169, www.hollyjohnsongallery.com.



Philip Lamb at Photographs Do Not Bend

The 20 black-and-white images Philip Lamb is showing at Photographs Do Not Bend arrive with the straightforward title "Photographs of Texas." A better title might have been "Photographs for Connoisseurs of Texas."

The images will resonate with particular potency for those viewers who have driven, preferably solo, south on I-35 or west on I-20 several more times than they might care to remember. Mr. Lamb specializes in that flat terrain. And when there is a whole lot of nothing to look at, every detail takes on special interest.

Outside of Dalhart, Mr. Lamb photographed an expanse of pasture with a row of dead poplars in the distance. He found what could be a life-size fake horse on a tall pole in Lampasas and a discarded mannequin torso in Cisco. Other images depict just expanses of land, such as a cotton field ready for harvesting or a prickly pear patch that has engulfed a barbed-wire fence. He also pays special attention to what gets caught in that barbed wire, whether it's a tumbleweed, a plastic bag or a big weed covered in outrageous fuzzy flowers.

Several images pick up on the sometimes cryptic messages encountered on the road. Private property posted "No Hunting" sends a clear message, but who put up the sign that reads "We Once Loved" and why? The decrepit building with the still visible painted message "Welcome to the Crossroads" seems vaguely ominous until you spot the faint remnants of the word "pool" off to the side. The Crossroads must at one time have been a functioning motel.

This work is not likely to get Mr. Lamb a gig with the Texas Tourism Commission, but it demonstrates his fondness for and wry appreciation of the state. Most of the images look as though they could have been taken 50 years ago, although all have dates no earlier than 2000. Cotton fields and grasslands don't change all that much. On a rather rundown farm that advertises "Fancy Fowl" for sale, the satellite dish in the background looks weirdly futuristic, even though it's one of those now old-timey huge contraptions.

---Charles Dee Mitchell

- "Philip Lamb: Photographs of Texas," through Oct. 13 at Photographs Do Not Bend, 1202 Dragon St. Hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Free. 214-969-1852, www.pdnbgallery.com.



Charlotte Smith at PanAmerican ArtProjects

PanAmerican ArtProjects inaugurates the fall gallery season in its new location on Dragon Street with Charlotte Smith's latest paintings.

Ms. Smith is a master at building up paint on the surface but in unexpected fashion. She recasts the tradition of globby, thick impasto in terms of tight, multicolored bumps of paint made from tiny stacks of drips.

The small, brightly painted stalactites in her work have evolved over the years. They began as rhythmic dots that, in playing on the surface of the canvas, emphasized a painting's flatness through contrast. They were ancillary, almost decorative dots dancing on the tradition of the painted plane. Now, the drips and dots are autonomous. Ms. Smith has shifted to modeling objects.

Dotted and speckled with nodules, Pinocchio is a metal rhombus painted in bright red. In pastel pink, Conversation is two panels opening down the center. Along the curving edges of each side, flagellumlike drips of red paint almost touch.

---C.N.T.

• "Charlotte Smith: Inside Out," through Oct. 13 at PanAmerican ArtProjects, 1615 Dragon St. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Free. 214-522-3303, panamericanart.com.