



ART-PATROL ST. LOUIS

December 10, 2007

The nasty weather did not deter the dedicated Art-Patrollers on Friday evening, though in retrospect it was practically balmy compared to what would come later in the weekend.

Our first surveillance assignment brought us to Bruno David Gallery, where we mingled with several of the usual suspects. It was four shows in one at Bruno David, and though they could not have been much more thematically diverse, it worked well, somehow.

In the main gallery was new work by Thomas Sleet. These are basically oversized door-mats, treated with cement, sawdust and acrylic paint. Of course, we are being intentionally simplistic. The patterns Sleet creates, and the visual depth he coaxes from these simple materials, are more than enough to make a casual viewer stop and take note. We liked that more than one of these pieces had a hole piercing right through it, which helped keep the work from being all about the topmost surface. This is art that demands to be viewed close up and far away, and which benefits from occupying a gallery space with several examples from the series. (While it is common for a series to benefit from being viewed *en masse*, certain kinds of work benefit more than others from being shown in the context of multiple examples.)

We found *Traces* to be an apt title for this series, as the work subtly hints at forms and ideas that may exist beyond the physical representations themselves. One might also imagine the work as representing mere traces of much larger patterns and forms, at once primitive and prophetic, backward and forward-looking. The balance held between the regularity and irregularity of substrate, applied materials and conscious forms creates a satisfying implication of patterns found in nature, which often have the outward appearance of perfect uniformity,

while closer inspection reveals gaps and imperfections.

In a way, *Traces* is akin to ambient music — it might take the viewer some time just standing in the space absorbing the energy created by the totality of the effort before it begins to make sense. This is work that will reward the viewer upon repeated viewings. We intend to pay the gallery at least one more visit before the next show opens.

In the print room were several examples of work from Wash. U's Island Press, which specialized in large, experimental printmaking on its Brobdingnagian presses. A large black-and-white print by Chakaia Booker echoed her sculptural work while reminding us of the work of Island founder Peter Marcus, and close inspection of a complex James Barsness print revealed carefully arranged and layered R-rated images.

We also liked the paintings by Ingo Baumgarten in the Project Room, especially to two on the western wall (both untitled, though accompanied by the actual names of the buildings they represent). These photo-realistic-style depictions of sterile industrial environments remind us that art is everywhere; it is all a question of perspective.

In the New Media Room (alcove?) was a video/performance/installation by Ella Gant, in which the artist herself was seated as a video montage played upon her. These kinds of things must be handled carefully in order to pull them off, and in our opinion this attempt met with success. It is always gratifying to be confronted with work that pushes boundaries and plays with multiple means of expression in a single piece, even as it often poses more questions than it answers.

Overall a well-rounded show at Bruno David, one that kept our interest for longer than we were expecting.