



Reel Sites

Laura Alich and Katie Koga shine at Focus Gallery

MATT MORRIS // AUG 22, 2007

Reel Sites, the new exhibition at Focus Gallery in Covington, contains objects of every kind, and the participating artists have used all kinds of materials and methods. The result is schizophrenic, with each wall of works feeling like it was taken out of a different exhibit. But if this collection of recent works by Laura Alich and Katie Koga is about anything, it's about the de-contextualization that occurs between works of art, where each piece comprises its own complete narrative.

The ambiguous relationships between works take advantage of the more antiquated details of the gallery space itself, creating a mystery theater populated by bald eagles, hairy children, all-night diners and fragments of other stories these artists felt the need to mention.

In some cases, Alich and Koga take the theatricality of the exhibition quite literally. "Prelude I," the first of three video works by Koga, plays on a small television that peeks out from behind a spiral staircase. A single figure plays an electric cord organ on the stage of a vacant auditorium, just far enough away that she can't be identified. An all-white chandelier hangs from the top edge of the screen, and her music continues like a melancholic carousel ride or a send up to a soundtrack by Philip Glass. The videos are longer than most viewers will have patience for, but the boredom they inspire emphasizes the "unheroic" elements of storytelling.

Two fantastic, unpretentious works, "The Spectator" and "Untitled," show us more elements of the theater. In the first case, Koga placed a small model of an opera box just high enough on the wall that it looks down onto the viewer's forehead. Red curtains, meticulously shaped out of cardboard with details in colored pencil, are

drawn back to reveal a flat black space behind a balcony railing. "The Spectator" morphs the viewer into the viewed. From there, the whole show unfolds to show off multiple versions and roles in the stories that are left mostly undisclosed.

Similarly, the untitled brown paper curtains are accordion folded and open at the center, making it unclear if the viewer is in the audience waiting for the show to begin or if he or she is the show, now framed by pieces of a handcrafted stage.

In an e-mail interview, Koga elaborated on this aspect of the work's intentions: "My work deals with creating your own world, your own 'reality.' In this show I was looking at just a few ways of creating objects that are describing a made-up world."

Alich's installations in the space adjacent to Koga's provide props and bits of theater sets, but leave the details of what's happened to the viewer. In "Ahead of Time," two white mugs and a spoon sit on a round, diner-style, wood-laminate table against the wall. All three objects on the table have had various amounts of well-sculpted icicles and pools of frozen-looking liquid added to them. One mug is full and frozen over, with fat, twirling icicles lining the rim. The other is empty, save for a line of small icy points along the handle.

These objects are reminiscent of gag paperweights made to resemble overturned cups of coffee or glasses of milk. But in this setting, they become a forlorn tableau. They conjure a narrative about a chilly conversation, loneliness and the risk of human connection.

Don't be misled by the detail and realism of the objects found in *Reel Sites*. Their specificity is a hook to get the viewer in touch with larger, abstract explorations into existence and the various distances that make up our lives.

Alich and Koga have put together an exhibition that compiles scenes from stories left untold. The fact that they seem to have gravitated to the least sensational aspects of their collected tales is aggravating and profound. They have quietly challenged how catchy or flashy an art show should be, and experimented with how little to reveal of their interests.

REEL SITES is on view at Focus Gallery through Sept. 1.

<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13025657/art-review-reel-sites>