Where's the Love?

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The Art Academy of Cincinnati's Convergys Gallery is hosting a group show of art produced at Covington Catholic High School through Friday. The psychedelic despair projected from the works is a pointed retort to the demands of a youth-obsessed culture in search of the next up-and-comer.

Possibly the savior in this exhibition is John Tibbs, whose installation sculpture **Love** stands guard over the mass of revealed emotions.

Tibbs constructed a freestanding partition from a set of salvaged frames and a base like a window box. Brown potatoes are variously suspended from the top edge of the structure and presented in a row of flower pots. Confetti of broken, pale green glass is shattered around the pots. On one of the window panes in the erected structure is an outline drawing of a couch.

What Tibbs shares with us about love is not a theme of simple nicety or baroque melodramatics: It's poor, convoluted and articulate. Through a collection of potentially contradictory symbols — roots that grow and nourish, broken glass and weathered wood, obvious puns (couch/potato) — the work is revelatory.

Tibbs has succeeded at making a madly appropriate response to his time, place and station. Preceded in an evident art historical lineage by the likes of Duchamp, Rauchenberg, Beuys and Jannis Kounellis, this precocious still-life totes the ragged effects of a century of artistic reevaluation along with an unsurprising bleakness in light of the past decade in which the artist and his classmates came of age.

Simultaneously altar and junk heap, "Love" embodies a degree of tragic Midwestern sincerity that's only vaguely achieved in the rest of the exhibition. What can be seen here from this young man is striking, and I can only hope to see more investigations into his wistful, romantic sadness in the future.

Work by students from Covington Catholic High School can be seen at the Art Academy of Cincinnati through Feb. 1.

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