



Joey Versoza: Casual and Charged

Attaching inner struggle to the commonplace at Aisle gallery

MATT MORRIS // JUN 1, 2011

Joey Versoza's new solo exhibition, at West End's Aisle gallery through June 24, is titled *Do You Make Work?* He answers his own question with just five pieces consisting of a number of digital prints, a projected video and two installations that make use of the gallery spaces and fixtures in conjunction with found objects.

Everything initially appears casual, unassuming. And were you to spend a great deal of time in the show, it wouldn't cease to be either of those things. Yet there is an undercurrent connecting all of the work that contemplates weakness, defeat, failure and loss.

It's rare to come across such a light-handed exhibition fueled by such dark stuff, but Versoza is not afraid of his own shadow. Actually, he invites those insecurities into the

ideation of these works. The art of what Versoza does is in offhandedly recognizing how found objects, pop-cultural detritus or fleeting moments he witnesses might be linked to a weighty inner dialogue.

Versoza was born in Marquette, Mich., and currently resides in Covington. He holds a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and did course work at University of Illinois at Chicago. His work regularly appears in galleries in Cincinnati and Chicago, but this exhibition starts off a busy summer that includes an artist residency at Harold Arts, a nonprofit organization in Chesterhill, Ohio, and inclusion in *LOL: A Decade of Antic Art* at Baltimore's Contemporary Museum.

One of Aisle's rooms is darkened, as the work "Eclipse" blocks out the gallery's three large windows with foamcore panels. These panels are not new to the space; they have been used in previous exhibitions. Only here they are brought to our attention for the first time as artworks. A set of circumstances — such as the blocking out of light — proves to have more potential for meaning than we may have previously supposed. The shadowy interior is transformed into a psychological space, like a thinking cave or a bunker. The heavy shadows in the room surround the two other works on view there.

Two crumpled pieces of found Mylar lying on the floor is titled "Defeated Warhol Pillows." While the visual resemblance to the Prince of Pop Art's "Silver Clouds" is obvious, highlighting the connection runs the risk of oversimplifying the work into a clever homage. But were we able to keep our Warhol baggage at arms' length, this work startlingly portrays a collapse beneath the weight and pressure of art-historical reference. And while the title suggests that this is Warhol's defeat, I posit that this is a bit of role-playing and that Versoza is confessing his own tremulous feelings about the creative process.

These shiny sheets don't float and bounce like Warhol's works. They lay in repose beneath a ceiling fan that has been turned on, so that a gentle breeze causes them to rustle, crinkle and shudder — the only noise in the space. They are dejected and craggy but luminous, like the surface of the moon or a Byzantine underworld.

The soft noises emitted by the sculpture transpose onto the silent film projected nearby. "All Over and At Once" is a video of a flowering tree turned sideways with a seemingly infinite number of pale pink blossoms being shed as the branches wave in a strong wind. The fluttering Mylar substitutes for the missing audio, and the ceiling

fan seems to re-create the breeze we are watching blow against the tree. The experience is disorienting, and as blossoms fall constantly to the ground on a loop, a sense of perpetual loss permeates the gallery.

Collectively titled “Slimeless Portraits,” Aisle’s corridor space is lined by 12 digital prints of the adolescent cast of actors on the 1980s Nickelodeon TV show *You Can’t Do That On Television*. The title suggests something missing, and their blurry faces register awe and anguish. The internal struggles suggested elsewhere are here seen across the faces of a crowd of teenagers, expanding the scope of the exhibition’s meaning to include an unsettled view of society. Fragments of a Buckminster Fuller-inspired geodesic dome can be glimpsed as their backdrop, so that the images feel both futuristic and dated.

The framed digital print “Footprints in the Sand” is a mash-up of the eponymous religious poem written by Mary Stevenson in 1936 and a still from a *Star Wars* film showing the tracks left on a desert planet by two robots. By pairing these disparate fragments from our collective experience, Versoza coaxes out patterns in how rhetoric and imagery are recycled through our mythologies.

The poem’s reference to personal weakness and the need for divine intervention paraphrases the entire exhibition’s content. Difficult periods of struggle and transformation lie at the crux between our physical lives and the metaphysics strived for by art or religion. And as pivotal as such periods of doubt and reckoning are in the formations of our notions of self, we often skirt around their discussion. These simple, thoughtful works are artifacts of such periods.

It is not that Versoza works fearlessly, just that his trepidation does not inhibit his progress.

DO YOU MAKE WORK? is on view through June 24 (with a closing reception 6-9 p.m.) at Aisle on the third floor of 424 Findlay St. in the West End. Gallery hours are Monday-Friday 1-4 p.m. or by appointment (call 513-241-3403).

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