

AXLE INDOORS

PETERS PROJECTS
1011 PASEO DE PERALTA, SANTA FE

THE EYE WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD. KUDOS TO PETERS PROJECTS

for the recent group retrospective at the mothership Gerald Peters Gallery. *Axle Indoors* featured some five hundred works by the one hundred fifty artists who responded to the gallery's invitation to everyone who ever exhibited at Axle Contemporary. The flyer accompanying the show notes: "Axle Contemporary was founded in 2010 by artists Matthew Chase-Daniel and Jerry Wellman as a collaborative work of art and an innovative vehicle for arts distribution. We intersect disciplines and encourage and promote experimental and creative approaches to art-making and presentation in our mobile gallery and beyond." "Beyond," in this instance, is the tony Gerald Peters Gallery, quite a change from Axle's normal venue, a 1970 retrofitted aluminum step van (walk-in), a type of truck adapted originally for deliveries like milk and bakery goods, now more familiar as the ubiquitous UPS and FedEx panel trucks.

The active words here are mobile and local. The van takes the art to people who normally would not visit a conventional gallery, and the five hundred works on view in this retrospective underscore Axle's commitment to local artists. Hence this high-end gallery venue is a big volte-face for Axle's innovative approach to "art distribution." What is gained and lost in the trade-off?

Like any wide-ranging group show without a unifying theme—case in point, the CCA Armory Show revival last May—*Axle Indoors* lacks the original context for the works, so that, as with the CCA show, the resulting salon or silent-auction feel of the gallery mutes its meaning and import. But, unlike CCA's prosaic, à la carte pluralism, the works here come across as more than simply cultural products. That is in large part due perhaps to a carryover of the aesthetic subtending the original venue, one that guided Axle's choice of these artists in the first place.

Elsewhere I've referred to such a common aesthetic as "a deep belief (borrowing from postmodern nomenclature) in 'grand narratives'—e.g. humanism, the Enlightenment

(downsized to 'projects'), art's social mandate—or at least in art's capacity to address them." That doesn't guarantee that all the work is engaging—some representational art early on could be stronger, and some of the abstract work is more notional than ideational. But overall, virtually all the work is accomplished—a tad too much in some works that skirt the decorative edge of derivative terrain. For all that, the well-planned layout and spacing of this wide-ranging exhibition by the curators manage to claim some proprietary space for each piece. Prospective visitors to the exhibition can preview the artists' works on Axle Contemporary's website (<http://www.axleart.com>; click "exhibitions"). While virtually every genre of contemporary art is present, the pieces cited here are more a cross section than a critique of the range of work in the show.

Gone Wild, Kathleen McCloud's large mixed-media wall figure, is enhanced by two framed works on paper that comprise *Loving the Birds of Appetite*, McCloud's (maybe) Zen Taoist homage to Thomas Merton. Charles Greeley's Japanese paper collages on canvas provide a fresh take on the familiar trope of Northern New Mexico landscape, while Carolyn Niman's low rider cyanotint and Janet Stein Romero's hip-chick monotypes capture that landscape's local culture. Mark Spencer's effortless command of drawing and figuration imbue his graphite studies with compelling narrative force.

For those who favor abstraction, there is Sydney Cooper's variegated leaf on metal panels from her exquisite *Indra's Net* series, Jonathan Morse's highly nuanced pigment prints, David Nakabayashi's unsettling collages, and Gina Telcucci's enigmatic papier-mâché (?) wall pieces. Two painterly collage panels from Craig Anderson's *Nature and Culture* series recall Rauschenberg at his best.

Eliza Naranjo-Morse's arresting soft sculpture *Coming of Age* is a life-size, fiber-filled supine figure whose stitched, flesh-tone pantyhose, accented with nylon head bandages of intense

cadmium yellow and a striped cobalt teal waistcloth, both belie and secure its sarcophagal allusion to some timeless ritual. Jamison Charles Banks's apt conceit of an upended replica of a Soviet-era cast metal bust of Lenin is a wry epitaph on the USSR. The visual appeal of Christy Georg's highly crafted woven-hemp and carved-wood wall piece *Giant Becket Brooch* hovers playfully between a charm bracelet and a docking coil for a Viking ship. Timothy Nero offers witty annotation to his artful wood-and-paint floor constructs, while Erika Wanenmacher achieves an oddly winsome effect with her thermoplastic standing sculpture *Messohippus*.

Those who need to lighten up need go no farther than the droll digital pigment print by Burning Books, *DEATH: Is it really THE END; Also, How can I avoid pornography*—a query made mute by Patti Levey's light-jet photo print *Coffee Porn*. The photo prints by Kirk Gittings capture a brooding sea viewed from a rocky coastline, while Kappy Wells' *Greenland* series offers eerie, eloquent charcoal-on-sheetrock studies of the ice-sheeted island's arctic coast.

Photographer and *THE* magazine publisher Guy Cross's *Famous and Not-So Famous Artists, Celebrities and the Like* bag of photographs includes a poignant image of the then eighty-something Agnes Martin, serene in her rocker and displaying the now iconic print by Mildred Tolbert of a younger Agnes seated in her studio, in her early forties. Peering cautiously at the viewer, the early Agnes evokes the fragile, melancholic maiden of Pre-Raphaelite D.G. Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini*.

Axle Indoors demonstrates that—pace Peters Projects—even in the lion's den, a mobile gallery can effectively convey art that espouses social and aesthetic values over market-driven trends of today's commodity art market.

—RICHARD TOBIN

Installation view

