

PREVIEW

Art review: Art Stands Still at Collar Works

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Jaimes Mayhew, *The Queer Quotidian Bed*, 2016. Installation view. Photo Wm Jaeger

Art Stands Still at Collar Works in Troy poses a riddle: how can you make forward-looking art that isn't looking forward? All without mirrors? Without going retro, or retrograde? Without being one tiny bit boring.

The curators, Natalie Fleming and Van Tran Nguyen, are quite clear about this goal. They present works that are "alternatives to spatial, temporal, and social progress." And they proceed bravely and without irony, packing the gallery with works by 15 individuals and collaborations who manage all manner of aesthetic intrusions.

The show is complex taken whole. Some works emphasize community involvement or group effort. Others take routes of introspection or avoiding convention. Quite a few are actually about individual endeavors, often in a deconstructive mode or in a tone of re-evaluation.

Take the curious work by a group called the Environmental Performance Agency, which you can hear in the gallery before you discern a small hexagonal piece of asphalt on the floor. Centered on it is a smartphone playing a video of a naked man with a hammer and chisel hacking away at the pavement, extracting (it appears) the piece that resides here as evidence. The tools, now mute, are also present. A small "recipe" on the wall describes their process, which was partly about "multisensory inputs."

There is 1960s Fluxus nonsense here, playful and knowingly simplistic. But one result—rediscovering that the Earth persists down there under all that, and that it still smells like dirt—is sweet in a post-industrial hippy way. And it does go forward by going backwards.

The curators often value looking both ways at once, confounding the viewer. An interactive video piece from 2003 by Silvia Ruzanka has been cleverly programmed to make a surveillance camera turn away from any person in view, so the monitor, when everything is working, shows no one. It's called the "(In)Security Camera."

More recent video has an outsize presence. "Salt Water" by Abe Abraham makes a dark bluish seascape out of a moving surface of bodies. Tai Kyung Seo's saturated color video shows the artist's self-dissection, the images thankfully imprecise and presumably at least partly pretend. "Raíces," by Regina José Galindo, appears as a large two-part projection, each showing aspects of a performance in Italy where immigrants from many different countries lie face down on the ground, as passive as plants except for their restless eyes. There are more conventional works here, such as a series of acrylic yarn works by Kurt Treeby that seem like hook rugs, each reproducing a famous painting (stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum) using different shades of black, the image barely visible. They reveal themselves just as you are about to give up. The series of silvery masks by Antonella Piemontese on one wall, derived from her own face, implies a manner of hiding. Whether for protection or subterfuge (they are called "Replacements") we can't be sure.

All of these works have been contrived to fit into the theme of not being avant-garde. Intriguing, yes. But alternative broad ideas like social critique, gender

identity, and body awareness come to mind. What really is this notion of not being progressive? Isn't progress built into it all, even if it's unfamiliar and not what we once called the cutting edge?

In a way it doesn't matter — the ultimate take on the work, and on the curation, lies with the visitor, and I guarantee you can't leave without being either moved, disturbed, touched, or amazed. As a powerful, bustling curatorial artwork, Art Stands Still is not standing still at all.

<https://www.timesunion.com/preview/article/Art-review-Art-Stands-Still-at-Collar-Works-13951721.php>

William Jaeger is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.