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GALLERIES

A Midsummer Group Show Dream
by Alicia Eler on July 26, 2013



*J.P. Rodman, "clownshoesbros" (2013),
enamel on steel and forged steel (all photo-
graphs by the author for Hyperallergic)*

CHICAGO — As we settle into midway-through-summer mode here in the city that does sleep sometimes, we spend more time hanging at the beach, BBQing with friends and generally chillaxing. With this slowing down of general movement comes the proliferation of — wait for it! — the summer group show. Hate on them if you want, but I'll be the first to admit that they're a great way for the art world to take a mini-vacay while still hanging out. Whisper Down the Lane at University of Illinois at Chicago's Gallery 400 is one of those summer group shows. It's like rolling up to the beach and being greeted by 29 artists, all of whom are wearing their most stylish bathing suits and designer sunglasses.



Judith Brotman, "The 93 Dreams of Summer" (2013), mixed media installation with audio

For the exhibition's premise, Gallery 400 Director Lorelei Stewart started by asking five artists — Dana DeGiulio, David Leggett, Christopher Meerdo, Cauleen Smith and Stephanie Syjuco — to each pick an artist, who would in turn pick another and so on until the game of "artist telephone" subsided, and the network came full circle. The work in this show runs the gamut, from Leggett's ascerbic commentary on race in the art world and pop culture to Dana DeGiulio's chunky abstract paintings that at times look like bodily incisions and Brad Hayes' lo-fi street photographs that bounce off of Cayetano Ferrer's catalogue of purposefully cheap reproductivity.



David Leggett, a collection of assorted drawings; left to right from top row: "300," (2013), "Don Cheadle Black (2013), "David danced for the lord" (2012), "Primitive" (2012), "Number four" (2012), "Sleep behind the wheel" (2012), "Giving up the ghost" (2013), "Painting Club" (2012), "Sleepin' on y'll (2013), "Cash out" (2013), "Making it look bad out here" (2013), "My vote counts" (2013), "Sister Girl" (2013), "Them boys" (2013), "Black Thang" (2012)

Judith Brotman's beach chair, plastic coffee mug and headphones set the tone for this breeze through the exhibition. In "The 93 Dreams of Summer" (2013), the viewer is invited to sit down in a beach chair, put on headphones, and listen to the artist read out loud passing, drifty dream memories about things like astrologers suggesting marriages to Republicans and Superman's arm becoming a carrot. The plastic coffee mug remains empty, but the cup of coffee that a visitor probably has in their hand from a nearby Starbucks might be half-full.



Karolina Gnatowski, "Smelly Rug" (2013), yarn, glass beads, hardware, findings and steel rods

Karolina Gnatowski's "Smelly Rug" (2013) reminds me of the rug in my kitchen that I stand on while washing dishes late at night. I know that it's getting really gross, maybe even moldy, but I refuse to wash it. If I decide to finally wash this one rug while also thinking about Aladdin's magic carpet ride, maybe my rug will transform into the one that Gnatowski has woven, which is a cross between a prayer rug and good luck charm that wards off bad spirits through an evil eye. Hanging from a rod on the wall, the carpet somehow contracts an additional woven eye, making this a funny smelly face, and one that you'd perhaps enjoy laying across while sunning on a moldy Chicago beach.

J.P. Rodman's "clownshoesbros" (2013) hanging panel embodies a shifting aesthetics of street art and graffiti with a layer of golden glitter over a rubbery red design that one might find emblazoned on a shifty bumper car. Twisted and broken bits of wrought iron curve their way around the bottom edges of this sculpture, which could just as easily be found discarded in the parking lot of some Chicago beach. The design could be found on the bottom of a teenage boy's skateboard, aligning the tongue-in-cheek title with a sort of carefree endless summer vibe.

The game of telephone continues through 26 more artists whose work suggests less of a cohesive theme than the power of networks to continue growing nodes, attaching to clusters. Thriving and expanding across geographic boundaries, the work in this show came from the heart of Chicago, and countries as far away as Russia. How it got here, however, is less important than the fact that it arrived just in time for a summer that will unfortunately end at the same time this exhibition closes.

Whisper Down the Lane continues through August 24 at Gallery 400 (University of Illinois at Chicago, 400 S. Peoria, Chicago).