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Galleries

Disposable, but not useless

Artist finds humanity and humor in trash

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Boston artist Rachel Perry Welty continues her campaign to sanctify the disposable in her show at Barbara Krakow Gallery, which by turns enchants and disappoints. Welty is at her best when she manipulates everyday detritus into low-grade existential angst. That may sound bleak, but it isn't: Her works pivot on their deft humor and humanity.

Rachel Perry Welty: same difference

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery, 10 Newbury St., through Feb. 26. 617-262-4490, barbarakrakovgallery.com

Expanded Painting

At: Space Other, 63 Wareham St., through Feb. 23. 617-451-3500, spaceother.com

Leah Piepgras: Euphoria

At: HallSpace, 950 Dorchester Ave., through March 1. 617-288-2255, hallspace.org

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The first thing you see when you step into the gallery is "Shopping experience (did you find everything you were looking for?)." She's crafted the question in parentheses out of scrunched up aluminum foil, and it flows in silvery cursive across the gallery wall. A grocery store checkout clerk asked her that by rote, Welty says in a statement. The question, intended to spark another purchase, has about as much weight as the material it's crafted from, but in this context it takes on deeper meaning.

"Messages" is a variation on a video Welty has shown at the ICA, in which she lip-synchs messages left for the wrong number on her answering machine. Here she transcribes on a giant yellow pad messages that were intended for her - from her son, her mother, a friend. They're full of "ahms" and "soos" and information or sentiment that

might have mattered in the moment but that most of us would have erased. Capturing them imbues them with meaning beyond the words themselves; this is the very stuff of relationship.

Welty also creates tiny reproductions of everyday products - here a sculpture made of about 200 mini Brillo boxes - that aim to critique consumer culture. She nods to the do-it-yourself trend by including a Brillo box cutout on the show's postcard. And she advertises the sculpture as an unlimited edition. It's all too derivative of Warhol. "Constellation #11,493," a wall-size sheet of paper with that many hole punches in it, each numbered, experiments with chaos and the mind's tendency to make order in a way that's been done too often.

A mirrored cartoon thought bubble hangs over the gallery's front desk; anyone who sits there appears to be thinking, and if you stand in front of it, the gallery attendant will be "Thinking of You," which is the piece's title. It's a clever riff on the narcissism involved in making and buying art. Plus, there's nothing more disposable than an image in a mirror. It comes and goes only a little more quickly than a hot commodity on the art market.

Beyond painting

Curator Paco Barragán has put together an often intriguing, sometimes bloated and self-important group exhibition titled "Expanded Painting" at Space Other. All the works in the show refer to painting in some way, but not all of them feature paint. It's a fun theme. For instance, Saso Stanojkovic offers the mildly witty "Film Marathon," a video of a painting of a cinema audience; light flickers over them to suggest the film screening. Roberto Coromina's "Black Painting" has more punch; Coromina has cut a painting up into shards, which project from the wall, floor, and ceiling, as if the painting just exploded.

Tim White-Sobieski's hypnotic four-channel video "New York City Suite" runs on large flat-screen wall-mounted monitors. They look like paintings, and White-Sobieski has them pulse with mostly abstract, grid-based computer graphics as quiet piano music plays; his is a friendly New York. Jaime Gili mounts several black-and-white posters around a small abstract painting. The posters sharpen and flatten some of the images from the painting, abstracting an abstraction.

You could call Clemencia Labin and Melvin Martinez maximilists - too much is not enough for them, although it is more than enough for me. Martinez's "Heartland" is so built up with paint and gaudy tones of glitter, it assaults the eye. Labin is a little more restrained, and consequently more interesting; her "Megapulpa Carme la" features a silver fabric snake ballooning out along the center; it's filled with gestures that recall comic book graphics.

Likewise, Dirk Meinzer has the installation "Megaron" that draws you in with interesting materials, then goes too far with its baroque adornments. He's tacked together a forbidding but fragile black-and-white fence around a plot of gooey-looking latex, from

which protrude several cucumbers. That all works, conveying some agriculture experimentation gone awry. But Meinzer festoons the fence with gaudy sculptures and cryptic paintings that merely distract from the installation.

Exhibit with teeth

HallSpace has relocated to new digs in Dorchester, and it inaugurates the space with Leah Piepgras's delightful painting exhibit. Piepgras is a whiz at creating nuanced, textured surfaces that you just want to tumble into. That alone would be appealing, but she zaps up the pitch by painting in sets of teeth, which hover and send out charged skeins of light. "When I Look at You I Turn Into a Cloud" has those threads joining to velvety blots of white, like lily pads on a pond gurgling with blue-and-white grit and bubbles.

The teeth, without a mouth or face, are edgy and frightening; they represent vulnerability, exposure, and perhaps power, and the lines that set off from them read like nerve impulses. It's lush work, but also freaky, and the combination works well.■

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