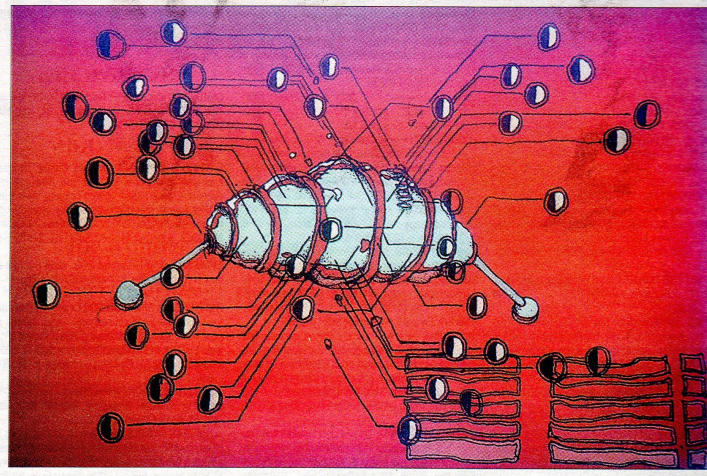


'Punk and Bloat' at 500X

By Mike Daniel



Rotation by Paul Booker, oil and ink on panel (2001)

What: 'Punk and Bloat', new art by Brennen Bechtol, Paul Booker, and Christopher Hart, at 500 X Gallery.

Background: As junior members of artist-run 500X, these three artists have had to wait a while to display any semblance of a body of work here. Foremost among them is Mr. Booker, who's been involved with the co-op for two years. The Plano native's hybridized paintings/drawings first emerged at Craighead-Green Gallery's "New Texas Talent" juried exhibition in 1998.

Another alumnus of "New Texas Talent" is Mr. Bechtol, who was still an undergrad at the University of North Texas in Denton when selected in 1995. His mixed-media collages had caught the eye of a few commercial spaces before he joined 500C in the mid-2000.

Ceramist Christopher Hart is the rookie of the trio, though he's already vice president of the co-op. Mere months out of the master's program at UNT, Mr. Hart is just now gaining notice after shows at Gallery 414 in Fort Worth and several local juried exhibitions.

How It Looks: Mr. Hart is formally trained in ceramic art, yet often the only relationship his work has to this discipline is that it's fired in a kiln. Perhaps the best description of his efforts is "conceptual clay art".

Take the three Rounder pieces, for instance. Junked steel auto wheels have been caked with modified ceramic glaze and heated to four-digit temperatures. The violent, gloopy results mimic what might happen in a nuclear detonation or volcanic eruption. Mr. Hart forgoes the stove with Son of RBET, a 12-by-6-foot canvas of steel grating caked with pottery-quality clay. Even drying rates and clocklike arc made by metal water pipe imply that the piece is about the passage of time.

Mr. Bechtol's work, usually a graceful combination of collage and painting on wood, has become minimal and more focused. A recent move to Lewisville has prompted several new pieces. Cocooning is a snow-white suburban house with a keyhole in front, through which a tiny television spews propaganda. Utopiaville features 264 smaller, identical plaster houses arranged in a master-planned pattern on the concrete (jungle) floor. Five simple but elegant wall collages poke fun at contemporary suburban society's emphasis on privacy, style, and consumerism.

Mr. Booker makes slick, doodle-y diagrams of fictional objects that play as perversions of design, functionality, and purpose. He continues his tradition of showing both studio work of varying sizes, including the jaw-dropping Accordiflex, a vertical oil-and-ink painting of what resembles a condom-capped bellows on a glossy red background, and on-site installations, such as the challenging Plates, a wall of drawing that incorporates tacked-on red arrows like wind-direction symbols on a weather map.

Details: On display through Dec. 16 at the gallery, 500 Exposition Ave. Hours: Saturday and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. and by appointment. Free. 214-828-1111.