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Art & Design

Time Out Chicago Issue 53: Mar 2–Mar 9, 2006

Kelly Kaczynski and Todd Mattei: “Drive of Eyes”

rowlandcontemporary, through Mar 11.

In September, Mark Rowland returned to the Chicago art scene after a stint in the corporate world and opened a gallery at Fulton and May Streets. His fourth show presents two young Chicagoans whose work, according to the gallery literature, has its “center firmly out of focus.”

Kelly Kaczynski starts off this decidedly narrative-free exhibition with a sculpture titled *Under Mountain*—a gloomy, globby, white mountain with a hot-pink cutaway revealing an underworld sanctuary populated by tiny deer. Her other work continues this terrestrial bent with sculpture derived from trees and cleanly rendered drawings of mountainous terrain with abstract touches of bright color. A large wall piece called *Travel Wary II*, in which Kaczynski takes a router to a piece of birch, brings up anxious feelings of being lost and studying a confusing map of the distant suburbs in search of an aunt’s house.

Where she loses us is in a pair of collages, each consisting of receipts. Nobody wants to be the jerk who says, “I don’t get it,” but, well, we don’t get it.

Todd Mattei’s pretentiously titled Photoshop manipulations also left us cold. They offer little more than low-res images, collaged together and occasionally distorted. Maybe he’s trying to make fun of “art.” His video work, however, gave us a bit more to chew on. In it, he’s created multiple layers of abstracted moving images (a guitar player, a smokestack, an owl-like creature, etc.) and mutilated logos, which results in something not unlike a billboard in *Blade Runner*.

“Drive of Eyes” is a mixed bag of mixed media, with the highs more than making up for the lows, and giving us good reason to return to this gallery.—Jason Mojica



Todd Mattei, *Male Seeks Dissociation*, 2006.

Art Letter (02/17/06)

There are several openings tonight; two of which really impress me.



Not in a long time have I seen a gallery new to Chicago like [NavtaSchulz](#). Located in the West Loop, this is their second location. The first is out-of-state. Most of their collectors are from Chicago, so sensing an affinity, they came here. This isn't a half-vast fledgeling effort. This gallery feels solid, confident, warm and strong. Because I didn't discern a single aesthetic running through all the work, I asked and was told the guide was whether or not they'd hang it in their home.

I like the NavtaSchulz Gallery. The space is clean, but not over done. And friendly. Too many galleries are snooty when a stranger walks in before the show is completely ready for viewing, as if they have some pretense, pretext and predisposition that says they have to perpetuate artifice. Not here. They didn't know me from Adam and they made me feel welcome. Then I introduced myself and their tone was consistent.

Jodi Navta and Ryan Schulz clearly love the art and artists they are showing, some of whom are from Chicago. Though they surely have solid business instincts, it is the love and the art that comes first and guides the professionalism they demonstrate in their first exhibit. Bravo.

[Rowland Contemporary](#) is another gallery I respect. And they are located nearby. They do not have an opening tonight but do have a tight, humorously challenging, stimulating, exhibit updating our notion of [trompe l'oeil](#). Convincingly using technology and technique, [Kelly Kaczynski](#) and [Todd Matei](#) get us to question what we are looking at. I thought it was fun and it made me think. That's a good thing.



Okay, the other show that opens tonight that got my juices flowing is at [Zolla/Lieberman Gallery](#). I've like [Cheonae Kim's](#) work for years. When I had a gallery I represented her. The art is fresh, abstract and intuitive. A lot of it comes from her knowledge of language and word structure. And a lot comes from her Korean culture which she didn't realize until she went back to visit after a

decade long absence. It fascinates me that she has had substantially more success, read sales, outside Chicago than she has here at home. We should fix that.

In another one person exhibition at the expansive Zolla/Lieberman is a tour de force exhibition of 'archeological' sculptures by [Stephen de Stabler](#). These works just plain sing. I first saw his work 30 years ago and now, as an artist in his 70's, de Stabler is making his best work. So many artists work so hard to grow, progress and rise to the top, that by the time they are 50 they either start doing greatest hits, or they just fade away. What a joy to see the strength and understanding in these de Stabler sculptures. He has mastered the media and explores wonderful nuances in his glazes and how they add to the content and meaning of his work.



Some museums feel empty

when I visit and some don't. One museum that always impresses me as popular is Chicago's [Museum of Contemporary Photography](#) which is affiliated with [Columbia College](#). They have a special exhibit called *Made in China*. I was surprised to learn that this quality exhibit was curated at the MoCP and does not travel. I've really like the large scale, large content photographs of Canadian Edward Burtynsky since I first became familiar with him about 10 years ago. I just bought [his book](#) about a week ago because I couldn't wait to see his Chinese work and then at this exhibit I see them full scale. And Burtynsky is only one of several photographers in the well-curated show that gives a fuller understanding of what China produces, how it produces it and what it recycles. This is a beautiful exhibit that is as informative as it is artful.

Something special is being inaugurated tonight. Five galleries make up the Bronzeville Art District ([Gallery Guichard](#), [Neleh Artistic Expressions](#), [Nicole Gallery](#), [SteeleLife Gallery](#) and the historically significant [South Side Community Art Center](#)). Together they've coordinated to have receptions every third Friday of the month. And to make it really easy for all of us they'll have a trolley that runs between all of them as well as McCormick Place. Easy parking, easy accessibility, camaraderie, new art. This is good.



That's it,

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Paul Klein

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Gallery makes 'Space' for look at urban life

February 10, 2006

BY MARGARET HAWKINS Galleries

Boundaries, structure, freedom, shelter, space. We take these elements of architecture for granted, yet urban spaces define how most of us experience our daily lives and our relationships.

In a provocative installation, Walsh Gallery presents the work of six Asian and Asian-American artists who deal with this subject.

Wang Wei's giant birdcage installation occupies the main gallery and is the exact size of an apartment he once rented in Beijing. The mazelike structure of wooden beams and steel scaffolding requires us to pick our way through a space in which we feel surrounded by bars and obstacles. Except for its high ceiling, it is a bit like a prison cell, yet the chirping of birds and the scattered pellets on the floor lend a kind of jungle feeling, too.

Wang Wei's work may be about the confining minimalism of urban life but it also is a pleasing kind of challenge, like a labyrinth that might lead to a surprising place. Better this than the claustrophobic nightmare of the Gao Brothers: their photographs show boxlike compartments crammed with their own naked bodies curled and contorted to fit the space.

These horrific images address the compression and compartmentalization of modern life and relationships. Paradoxically, sometimes it's harder to be close when physical proximity doesn't allow any distance. But these pictures also remind us of those discomfiting photos we've seen recently of Third World jails, places where living bodies are warehoused with no thought to sanitation or privacy, let alone comfort or sanity.

"My Space, Your Space," Walsh Gallery, 118 N. Peoria; (312) 829-3312. Through Feb. 25.

Fred Stonehouse's new work incorporates his signature crying man, a kind of lachrymose clown with big, sad eyes that are so dramatically woeful they're almost funny, though in the past the paintings seemed genuinely sad. The new ones are more like a campy pantomime or distant memory of emotion. The figures are painted in a dense, dark style with blobs of color and sketchy drawings of what appear to be water bottles or internal organs floating around in front of them.

Stonehouse's style of distressing his work by placing a screen of messiness over his carefully painted figures suggests a layering of memory. He shows us how events get in the way of and add to our personal myths, partially obscuring them but also remaking them in a constant process of evolution.

"Songs and Dreams," Fred Stonehouse, Gescheidle, 118 N. Peoria; (312) 226-3500. Through Feb. 25

A collaborative exhibition by Kelly Kaczynski and Todd Mattei uses video animation, digitally constructed images, drawings and sculpture to make us question where truth ends and fiction begins.

"Drive of Eyes," rowlandcontemporary, 1118 W. Fulton Market; (312) 312-421-6275. Through March 11.

Margaret Hawkins is a local free-lance writer.