

July 13, 2005

ART REVIEW; Add the Fireflies and It's a Summer Idyll

By HOLLAND COTTER

For summertime art as light as a lemonade, drift by Cinders, a Williamburg, Brooklyn, storefront with a street-facing gallery and a shop in the back. The gallery space is minute, about the size of a one-room cabin. But for the current exhibition, "The Porch Show," on through July 24, its interior has been turned into a rural backyard, with a wood-frame porch, an Astroturf lawn, gardening tools and work by 17 artists jostling for space.

The architectural conceits are the show's main attraction. Cinders's artist-owners, Kelie Bowman and Sto (he uses a one-word name), designed and built it. Artist friends contributed props. From Hanna Fushihara, who runs Little Cakes Little Gallery out of her apartment in the East Village, came materials for a rock garden: a pile of glitter-dusted papier-mâché stones. From Erika Somogyi, there are sculptural wind chimes. And from Kim Schifino, a plywood lawn mower and a sprinkler with a spray of cut-out water drops.

As for wildlife, it's abundant, from David McQueen's wasp's nest hugging a wall, to a frog-size frog carved by George Ferrandi from a bar of Ivory soap. (Ms. Ferrandi -- yes, Ms. -- who owns a local business called Saints Alive and specializes in restoring religious images, will have a Cinders solo in September, which I anticipate with pleasure.)

Mostly, though, nature turns up in paintings, the majority of them done in a faux-naïve narrative-fantasy style that had collectors standing in line at the last New York Armory Show. Chris Duncan's fleet color pencil drawings of birds, a butterfly print by Steven Harrington, and Jo Dery's silkscreened flowers all fit the show's bucolic theme. And a video animation titled "Returning Home" by Ms. Bowman makes perfect sense within the domestic setting.

It also adds a welcome dash of astringency to the prevailing sweetness: the looped images of morphing houses and figures suggest that constantly returning home is basically the same as never being able to leave. Megan Whitmarsh's minute collage-paintings of kids dressed as cheerleaders and comic-book heroes also strikes a weird-winsome homey note, as do, in different ways, surrealist pictures by Diane Barcelowsky, Kyle Field, Harrison Haynes and Aron Wahl, and a tart home-away-from-home, the-weather-is-here-wish-you-were-beautiful video postcard from Alan Calpe.

Despite such traces of pretty poison though, the Cinders show is forthright in what it wants to be: a nostalgic plug for old-time small-town community in a great big urban world. The show opened with a neighborhood cookout; Brooklyn bands play the porch on different nights of the week (Glen/Glenda and the Goodgood were there last Saturday, Prewar Yardsale will be there tomorrow night and Racoon and Dan Freil will appear on Sunday); the gallery's shop, crammed with artist-made zines, comics, coloring books and clothes, feels like a general store selling sundries and notions.

A back-to-the-garden communal urge, a little post-hippie, a little post-high-schooly, is a distinctive strain among young American artists. And it has produced a distinctive kind of art, which "The Porch Show" in some ways exemplifies: disarmingly small scale, labor-intensive, with an air of precociously knowing naïveté.

It's a fragile aesthetic. Seen in its originating context -- an apartment, a club, a shoestring storefront gallery -- or in safety-in-numbers group shows, it can be persuasive. Transferred to a neutral setting and examined one piece at a time, it tends to fare less well, to look inconsequential, to dissolve into pixie dust.

In fact, anyone with a serious pixie dust allergy should probably pass Cinders by. For everyone else, though, the total "Porch Show" experience is likely to work just fine. And so, no doubt, will the experience that replaces it later this month, Kathe Izzo's "Garden of Love."

Ms. Izzo, who describes herself as "a cross between a prostitute and the Dalai Lama," will live in a self-created leafy bower in the gallery for five days, sleeping in a hammock and receiving visitors by appointment for the purpose of sharing a higher love, meaning, I gather, spiritual or psychological. Chelsea would call this installation art, or a performance piece, and close the door at 6 p.m. Cinders advertises it as "a passionate botanical experience for the heat of the Brooklyn summer" and could well stay open all night, which is about as communal and total as you can get in this town.

"The Porch Show" continues through July 24 at the Cinders Gallery, 103 Havemeyer Street, at Hope Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn; (718)388-2311.

[Copyright 2005 The New York Times Company](#) | [Permissions](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)