



SURFACE TREATMENT

What: "Body of Work" by Riley Robinson
Where: STC VAM Art Gallery, Bldg. B-103, Pecan Campus
When: Nov 4-Dec 4, 2019
Reception Dec 5, 5:30-7:30pm
Hours: 8am-3pm Tues., Wed., Thurs.
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Body as a Mental Concept

Steel structures comment on past and present with sly slashes of humor.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Riley Robinson is about ideas. Walking into his "Body of Work" exhibition at the STC Art Gallery may initially pause an unthinking viewer if "viewing" was all that was on the agenda, but these large works on display are springboards into thought. The three steel-constructed works comprising this installation, "Human Cannonball", "Dumpster", and "Untitled (Outhouse)" are alive with ideas. The cursory glance will prove insufficient for their appreciation.

Each of these sculptures references an object that objectifies human behavior, physically or metaphorically. Robinson's "Untitled (Outhouse)" faces the entrance and immediately engages us with its tumble of white ceramic toilet plungers. Interesting

notions soon start to unfold. There's a wicked humor here with dozens of plungers spilling out of the outhouse structure and sprawling haphazardly across the gallery floor. The excessive number suggests futility. Although the toilet and plunger are from related categories, their temporal existence is out of sync, rendering their Incompatible relationship hopeless.

This specific work speaks with many meanings. For those of you who are not familiar with the outhouse plan, waste did not flush; it fell into a pit. The steel construction of this house is in contrast to the lightweight wood construction originally used for easy moving once the pit was full. The plungers, pristine white, are exactly made. Perhaps they are only symbolic echoes of times someone failed repeatedly in an attempt to do the impossible. There is also a sexist twist. The design, reminiscent of the old American outhouse with a crescent moon indicating that it was for women, is an early symbol that denoted subordination of women through gender restrictions. It references the "separate spheres ideology" from early 19th century America that the woman's place was not in the public realm, but in the privacy of the home where the outhouse would be located. The plungers reflect the never-ending women's work, voicing not only incompatibility for the job, but necessary social obsolescence.

"I make artwork that uses insight, humor, and artifacts of history," explained Robinson. "My work often manifests as materially complex sculptures requiring a high level of craft." The steel constructed "Outhouse" and "Dumpster" are patinated to mimic wood. A contradictory object, the meticulously crafted steel "Dumpster", which in the non-art world would normally be steel, pretends to be wood with a wood-mimicking surface. Its vertical placement seems suitable for human demise. Consider descriptions of the body after death.

The "Human Cannonball", a circular, steel drum-like structure, encases a padded interior referencing a space for a human seating. There is implied human motion here; mankind moves forward at ever increasing speeds often blind to the knowledge of destination ramifications other than fast and straight ahead. With our fascination with the speed of technology we are leaving humanity as empty as the space within the sculpture. But with that comfortable padding, why should we care? Perhaps this is the stage prior to the "Dumpster".

Robinson plays a balancing game between concepts and the crafted object. His objects alone are powerful through his control of his materials, but his sculpture easily slides over into a post-conceptual framework because with these works, ideas are equally important. His work embodies the post-conceptual spirit in its impressive synchronization between concept and image.

Robinson is the Studio Director at Artpace in San Antonio. Plan to attend the reception for "Body of Work" in the STC Art Gallery on December 5.

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