



Destiny by Charles Neumann

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: ***Ply Work & Bent Steam: Charles Neumann and John Webb***
Where: Brownsville Museum of Fine Art, 660 E Ringgold St., Brownsville
When: From August into September 2017
Hours: 10am-4pm, Mon-Tues; 10am-8pm, Wed; 10am-4pm, Thurs-Sat.
Contact: 956 542 0941
General admission applies.

Low Tech = High Art

Take your time to appreciate the often mind-twisting thinking on display at this show.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONOTOR

This is an awesome exhibit! With low tech tools and common materials Charles Neumann and John Webb have created uncommonly high art. Hosted by the Brownsville Museum of Fine Art, *Ply Work & Bent Steam* weaves together functional products – puzzle chairs and other furniture without joints – and perceptive sculptures that pierce the viewer’s mind. “These works cuddle a witty collectivism embracing notions of social construct, privilege and expostulations of love and identity,” stated David Freeman, STC Art faculty member and Curator of this exhibit. “Everything is crisp, clean, and clever; there exists an order and everything is civilized,”

This joint exhibit works well; both artists are clearly passionate about wood and the tools used to work it. Unlike smaller pieces that may be overlooked, Webb’s larger plywood sculptures are show stoppers; they won’t let you just cruise by. Not only do they embody statements about process, but continue further into astute commentaries of society and the world around us. His “Untitled” piece depicting nine female derrieres in high relief, shows partial ruby colored handprints on lower areas where women may be occasionally slapped as a sexual innuendo. According to Freeman, Webb researched a series of such slaps to see how the hand actually struck the flesh, then reproduced the marks with small, vertical, glass shards. To touch them conveys the anguish felt by the recipients of such a slap. His “King of Birds” takes a more heroic stance. Plywood strips, molded and fitted together for support (no nails in this artist’s work), suggest the fierce bird capable of constructing such a nest. Interestingly, his life-size figurative

sculptures express bodies aspiring to the technology of robotics, but their mechanical references echo the natural material. Webb's conversion of meticulously stacked, shaped, and formed plywood is sensual craft at its best.

While one artist amazes us with his woodworking and representations, Neumann astonishes us with his wit and relationship to the tools themselves. Sometimes reshaping and infusing them with human attributes, he calls attention to our own conditions, social interactions, and futility. Human events are seen through these common implements. For "Stash House", a group of screwdrivers become undocumented refugees, regimented and cramped within a tight perimeter, atop a narrow support structure of Neumann's own construction; true to the ethics of this exhibition, he constructs his own sculptural supports. "I Think, I Can" somehow moves Descartes beyond the mind. Here, the head of a hammer becomes a working figure with legs, ultimately moving itself with the attachment of wheels at its nether end. With the sculpture, "Destiny", Neumann persuades us to look within ourselves as a two-headed hammer curves in on itself.

It would be helpful if there were an explanation somewhere about Webb's puzzle construction. His practice of fitting pieces together, furniture and sculpture, without joints is not readily comprehended, and this is a fascinating aspect of his work. He has master's degrees from UCLA and UTSA and teaches architecture at UTSA. Neumann currently teaches art at South Texas College, with an MFA from Texas Tech. Their sculpture and functional wood exhibition, *Ply Work & Bent Steam: Charles Neumann and John Webb*, offers an art experience worth a trip to the lower Valley.

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