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## Paper Matters

*Artists' methods in Pulp exhibit as edgy as their subject and POV*

By Michael Joe Krainak

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Print artist Joey Lynch and Pulp Gallery in Benson have proven to be a good match in the past and the latest collaboration is no exception. Lynch opened the new gallery at 6114 Military Ave. in 2007 with his own exhibit, but this time around he has curated the new work of two young area artists, Carlos Guerrero and Andrew Hershey via his own nomadic showboat, Tugboat Presents.

Pulp, founded by arts entrepreneur Brigitte McQueen, is a combination gallery space devoted to works on paper and shop featuring stationary, books and accessories. Past shows indicate that McQueen is committed to exhibiting local and national artists whose work tends toward the edgy and the controversial. The art in this unique show, which continues until May 12, falls effectively into both categories.

It's not surprising that Lynch chose Guerrero and Hershey for this current Tugboat docking as he shares their interest in socio and political issues while experimenting with their own mediums. Though their point of view and technique is quite different, it's their departure from traditional process that all three have in common. Lynch says his own style falls somewhere in the middle of Guerrero's layered, mixed media drawings and Hershey's reductive prints.

"My combination of screen printing and other media is similar to Andrew with his wood blocks," Lynch said, "but I tend to do a lot of hand painted and drawn layers similar to Carlos." Despite their differences, one thing Lynch says they all share is their tendency to cover up the main image or subject matter of each work "giving glimpses to the technique as well but with hopefully a bit of mystery as I feel that Carlos and Andrew both do."

Much of this "mystery" as to how method serves vision is revealed in their artist statements. Hershey, the media director at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, describes his style of printmaking as a "process of erasure and revelation." A printed image is placed face down onto a carved figurative woodcut and sanded, which removes layers of paper introducing the figures into the printed



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environment. After waxing the sanded paper the print is often mounted or hung to allow viewing from both sides, but in each case figures and backgrounds are never seen as one.

This fade in/fade out effect, especially as to figures and the delicate nature of the sanded paper, sometimes tattered and torn in places, Hershey says, “echo the fragile nature of life.” In a concurrent show at the RNG Gallery this translates to the artist’s prints depicting wasted landscapes, which comment on “increasing environmental pressure such as global warming, thinning resources and unsustainable lifestyles.” Yet, despite the eco-conscience, his prints of urban street scenes and natural settings contain an inescapable simple beauty that Hershey creates from such mundane ordinary settings.

In the Pulp show Hershey’s method instills his prints with a more socio-humanistic agenda. A number of his images here feature ghostlike figures, solo or in pairs in domestic or social settings. “This relates to an underlying concern with perceptions of gay couples,” Hershey says. “Since gays and lesbians have no visually recognizable characteristics, it becomes possible for this group to blend into dominant society.” Consequently, the “coming out” and “blending in” cycle is illustrated by the figures in the prints melting in and out of the background imagery.

Hershey’s eight prints here are either titled “All We Have Is Now” or are untitled. The former tend to reflect the beauty of everyday life and finding significance in the moment or the present, before it too, like the figures, fade from view and reinforce the theme and title, “All We Have Is Now.” One major motif often here, and even more so in the latter series, is a figure searching or exploring, especially involving doors and drawers.

This fits well into his prints of a gay couple also searching for a way to fit into “normal” society without sacrificing their own identity as a couple or individual. Interestingly, though they are pictured in familiar domestic settings Hershey’s shadow figures are fading fast rather than blending in. In a conservative society and its institutions, “don’t ask, don’t tell” or “coming out” may be a lose-lose proposition.

While Hershey’s reductive prints are impressionistic, quiet and reflective, Guerrero’s nearly two-dozen acrylic and graphite drawings on panel are more assertive, confrontational and expressionistic. In his artist statement, Guerrero, currently an artist-in-resident at the Lux Art Center in Lincoln, says “my work explores ideas of personal and cultural isolation using memories colored by my imagination to examine our social conditioning ... I explore issues of human fragility, cultural identity, suffering, loss of innocence and how the walls we build ... and break down define our interactions.”

Despite his characteristic bluntness, his method or process is more conceptual, which he describes as “hiding” or “covering up” through the metaphoric use of whitewashing as it applies to covering up anything soiled or unsightly. “In my work I use various steps of layering and exposing paint and graphite in order to suggest this idea.” Guerrero combines this approach with mark making, a childlike color palette and an often-symbolic scenario that is complex and provocative.

Consider first his “Midnight Dream Sequence (Boy with Rocket)” in which a young black boy holds a rocket cradled in his arms but wears a paper bag over his head that depicts a church steeple on its cover. Masks are curious things as they often reveal as much as they conceal. Senator and presidential candidate Barack Obama recently was castigated for telling the truth that the poor and disenfranchised often turn to religion when their dreams and aspirations are repressed. Perhaps the midnight dream of our boy with rocket is a daily nightmare of racial identity and social pressure.

“Cake Face 1, 2, & 3” is an interesting series of three whitewashed portraits who appear to be wearing pancake makeup, safe and secure behind their own masks of racial identity. Yet their eyes look furtive and fearful, suggesting either reactionary white folk or blacks trying to be “white” in order to break down barriers. Either way, the result is the same. They all look so alike implying that they think and feel alike and stand for the same things though there is no evidence of what that is,



as if to say “all you need to know is I’m white. I stand behind my stereotype. I apply new layers daily.”

In “Pop and Johnny are in Heaven,” an odd title for this intriguing diptych, a lone bearded black man on the left outside edge of his panel stands opposite young Johnny at his with a telling gap between the two. If the bright blue setting is meant to be heaven, they are clearly in their own half and never the twain shall meet. Curiously, Johnny has a golden glow surrounding him while Pop seems isolated, suggesting that in the eyes of some the former is the more chosen one.

Another series, numbers 14, 15, 16 and 17 intrigues, all with different titles, three of which seem to comment on the fourth – simply called “Head,” which in this case is the head of a black man imprinted on a head stone wide-eyed and gazing across a white picket fence. Several of Guerrero’s drawings deserve to be larger and this powerful image is one of them. Though the connection of the other three to “Head” isn’t obvious their images of the Civil War, an additional war, possibly Vietnam, and a politician or minister at a podium legislating or dictating may comment on who really was victimized despite the promises of all three.

Guerrero has several other pieces in this two-man show, many of which are subtle and reflective like Hershey’s prints, but the above better address the couplet from Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Walls” that the artist identifies with in his artist’s statement: “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall, That wants it down...”

#### **‘Bulling’ for Bemis**

Several of us Omahans know the glory and the horror that surrounds the mechanical bull at the Stumble Inn. With that in mind, consider what’s likely, I stress likely, to be a much more tame event at the Bemis Underground this Friday, April 25.

The BU will be celebrating three years of hosting and curating some of the best local and regional artwork in Omaha. What better way to celebrate than to bring in a giant, bucking, mechanical bull for area art patrons to straddle? There’s no better way in Nebraska, that’s for sure! The evening features Rob Walters as MC and a “surprise” guest DJ. Bull rides are \$2 each. Starts at 9 p.m. at the Bemis Underground, 12th and Leavenworth streets. More info at [BemisUnderground.org](http://BemisUnderground.org).

#### **Art to die for**

German artist Gregor Schneider is planning on exhibiting the ultimate sacrifice – death. The Art Newspaper reported that Schneider wants to show a person dying as part of a performance piece.

“I want to display a person dying naturally in the piece or somebody who has just died,” the artist said. “My aim is to show the beauty of death ... I am confident that we’ll find people to take part.”

Schneider apparently has a doctor who runs her own private clinic in Düsseldorf on board to help find volunteers willing to die in public in the name of art.

Schneider told the Art Newspaper he hopes to stage the performance at the Haus Lange museum in Krefeld, Germany. If the museum doesn’t wish to participate, Schneider said he will stage the performance in a studio space in his hometown of Rheydt.

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