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The Mystery of Meaning, Existing Discretely in a Parallel Universe



Amy Pleasant, *Untitled*, 2012, Ink on paper, 22 x 30".

PLUG Projects
1613 Genessee Street
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Kansas City
Secrets
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By BLAIR SCHULMAN

To hint at the possibility of meaning, keeping it "just out of reach" as the folks at PLUG projects tell us, pretty much describes ALL works of art, does it not? Otherwise, it's advertising. In the case of *Secrets*, PLUG's latest exhibition, one must discern the mystery of six artists as we, the viewers "grapple for clues ... on a journey of self-discovery." Whether this is a sophisticated gesture or so keenly oblique that it becomes alienating, depends on the individual takeaway. Some of this work does influence our behaviors, which for PLUG projects, is involved and impressive as they continue their role as the young upstarts in the local arts ecosystem.

The obvious case in point are Corey Antis' two sculptures from his Natural History series (*Untitled*, wood, acrylic, stain, 2012) that recently took itself, and PLUG, to the MDW art fair in Chicago. They are placed dead center in the room on steel pedestals, ensuring everyone acknowledges their existence. One appears as an iceberg, maybe, the other is clearly a set of books in their own sleeve, but void of further embellishment, the pieces are a little bit of mindfuck, that takes some pondering to decide what you think you're being told that this work actually represents. Observing them vertically, they appear narrow, which in turn directs your eye right up to a video loop by Lisa Young (*Driver*, DVD, 2008) of a ball whooshing through the air at irregular intervals. Though with its own sound effects, the video is a little silly, but contrives a possible connection between it and Antis' work. Who is hitting the ball? Where is it going? All we see is this ball floating through the clouds. The way it is presented to us, one can wonder if it has anything to do with the blank mystery of those wood sculptures. Separately, on another wall, a smaller-



Kate Stewart, Picnic, 2012, Charcoal, spray paint, mica powder on paper, 24 x 18".

screened Super 8 film from Jason Glasser (*The Grape*, digital transfer, 2011) spherical objects float by an impressive mountainscape. While this could be the more interesting film, that it was left apart to stand on its own led me to believe the secret between Young and Antis' work is one of collusion.

So too are deceptively simple pieces from the other artists here (James Gallagher, Amy Pleasant, Kate Stewart). The ideas they present sit on the precipice of meditative and intelligent. I think it's important to pay attention to the ideas offered by others that form our thinking about ourselves. Is my life a series of patterns that flow into one another, generated from the images presented by others? How am I influenced by juxtaposition and presentation? Their portrayal is a mystery, but spending time with the work here begins to disclose shape, shadow, line and light. Questions become further questions that are eventually answered long after we cease to look at it. Sometimes it takes a poet to bring some clarity:

*I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds*

— Wallace Stevens,
Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird (1917)

In its past, PLUG has found their exhibitions at odds with its own spatial integrity; but the principals (Cory Imig, Amy Kligman, Misha Kligman and Caleb Taylor) are learning to break away from the space's three presentation walls and street front window as a sole basis for arranging a show. Amy Ho's silk organza installation set within a dividing wall space (*Endless*) went on, it seems, ad infinitum. Carrie Scanga's folded tissue installation (*BREATHE: The Emergent Colony*) overtaking the entire room from above was like a golden cloud cover. These ideas and evolving curatorial styles tells me they're growing comfortable with risk-taking and *Secrets* is a furthering of these risks.



