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Visual Arts

"The Big Show" at Lawndale Returns, Not as Big But With Plenty to Like

By Meredith Deliso Wed., Jul. 25 2012 at 12:00 PM
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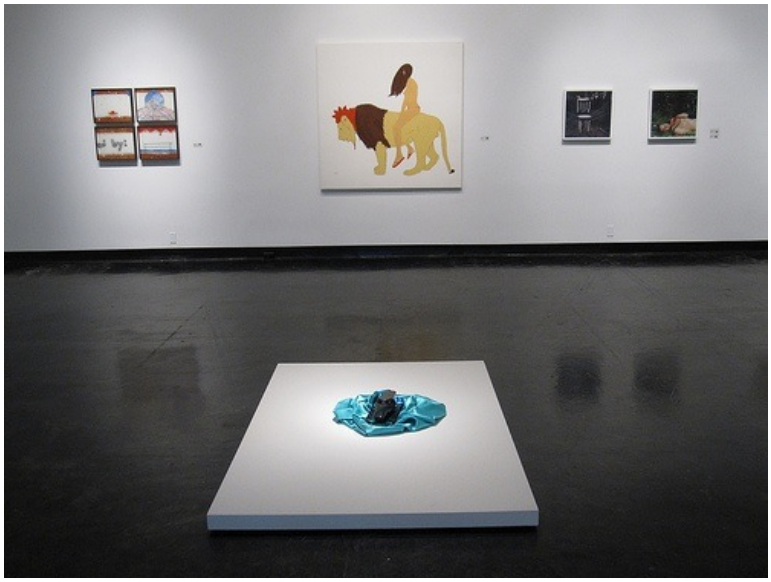

Part of "The Big Show" at Lawndale Art Center, with Katie Wynne's tie rack piece in the foreground.

Check out Marco Torres' take on the Big Show and his photos.

The formula is a simple, if laborious, one -- hold an open-call for new, never-before exhibited works from artists within a hundred-mile radius, select a curator to cull through the hundreds of submissions, and then put on a big show. Repeat next year.

Of course, Lawndale Art Center's popular juried open call, "The Big Show," is never as predictable as its construct. It's as much a reflection of the area artists and their work as it is the personal taste and sympathies of the curator. And in this year's big show, Marco Antonini of Brooklyn's NUTUREart has proven to be an adventurous curator whose style knows no boundaries.

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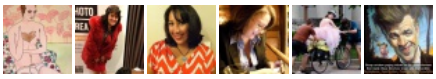

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As has been well-noted by this point, this is one of the leanest of the Big Shows yet. Among the 915 submissions from 381 artists, Antonini selected 69 works from 61 artists. But don't let that mislead you -- it's still a full show with plenty of surprises. There's ceramics, photography, video and painting, plus the use of unexpected materials, from mattresses and spandex to billboard vinyls and household electronics.

The big attention-grabber in this regard is Katie Wynne's ingenious untitled piece, composed of simply a motorized tie rack and blue satin on a white platform. The satin is attached to this insect-like contraption, which is turned on so that it's constantly whirring and catching the cloth in its "legs." It's creepy, suspenseful and mesmerizing all at once, and you can watch it for hours. I kept coming back to it just to see what happens.

"Always" by Kassandra Berman

Kassandra Berman has another minimal work that manages to pack a punch. *Always* features a piece of cardboard with the word "always" in orange capital letters on it that Berman's added some glitter to and displayed in a much larger frame than necessary. This drab piece of cardboard has suddenly become poignant and wistful, a long cry from the Dumpster it was most likely destined for.

Scattered throughout the gallery are more pleasant discoveries that are composed of seemingly simplistic materials or minimal set-up, but stand out due to their cleverness, uniqueness or execution.

Mari Omori's *Time Machine* features tiny white soap sculptures on a white platter. It has a pleasing, clean, geometric element to it. And, this being soap, it's fragrant, too, which adds a delightful sensory component to the experience of the piece.

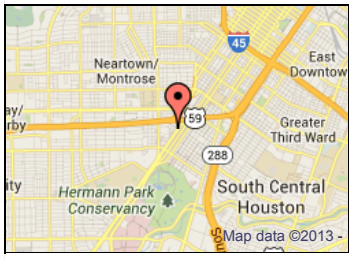
Between the first and second floors of the gallery, you'll find Matthew Glover's *Now Is When I Wish It Was Autumn*, a playful installation of knitted reddish-brown leaves. Anyone with a tourist's knowledge of Houston's weather can get the joke, but it's still a funny one.

The title of Donna E. Perkins's video -- *Beached Bag, Galveston* -- sets up the premise well. It's a three-minute 30-second loop of a black plastic bag, washed repeatedly by waves at the shore. The TV is placed low to the floor, closer to your ankles than to your eyes, so that the experience is as close to the original as possible, as if you were on a beach in Galveston watching this helpless bag get twisted by the waves over and over. Like Wynne's tie rack-satin piece, it keeps you oddly rooted.

These highlights hardly scratch the surface of this year's installment of "The Big Show." There will surely be pieces that leave you spellbound, and others that leave you scratching your head at their inclusion. But that's just part of the fun.

"The Big Show" at Lawndale Art Center, 4912 Main, runs now through August 11. For more information, call 713-528-5858 or visit www.lawndaleartcenter.org.

Location Info



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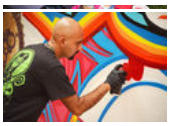
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