

"Crit Group 2018" at grayDUCK Gallery

The body of work by artists in the Contemporary Austin's current critique group often engages the body in some way

REVIEWED BY TATIANA RYCKMAN, FRI., AUGUST 24, 2018



Boy Play by Christa Blackwood (Photo by Brian Fitzsimmons)

What does one think of when one thinks of The Body? The physical manifestation of our finite existence, perhaps. A mass of land or water or people. A collection of work. The "Crit Group 2018" show is a conversation with the body of work created by the Crit Group's body of participants. And the work itself, though disparate among the artists, often references our shared corporeal being. Facilitated by the Contemporary Austin to confront the soft, ambiguous "after" that follows graduation from art school, Crit Group provides local working artists with an opportunity for professional development and, of course, feedback. The loose unifying element of critique that brings these artists together invites the viewer to engage critically with the work, to see each piece both for what it is and as a moment in the maker's trajectory as an artist.

Upon entering the gallery, the viewer is confronted with the visceral mixed-media collage work of Christine Garvey. With titles like *Scab*, *Mouth*, and *Strip*, it's hard not to feel that the saturated, pink-hued works are bodies cut open and laid bare. This contrasts with the grayscale subtlety of Rachel Wolfson Smith's *Fossils* opposite it. Under the delicate graphite drawing of tropical plants, disembodied words appear ("Absent," "All of this/Useless," "Beauty") as if from underground.

In Dawn Okoro's paintings and video installation, bodies draped in metallic fabric and obscured by swatches of gold remind the viewer of their own tactile existence, tempting them to engage bodily. The feeling is amplified by the audio of crinkled fabric accompanying the video.

Similarly, the persistent tick of the slide projector from Adrian Aguilera's untitled (this is an island) travels through the gallery, the sound keeping the viewer alert to their immediate surroundings, as if someone were always moving just out of sight – a sensation echoed in the work. Composed of disembodied text – primarily captions removed from their images – these pieces leave the viewer acutely aware of what is missing. In the case of the projection, it is the bodies of land and water that are described but absent.

Conversely, Jenn Hassin's sculptures, formed from wood and Hassin's pulped clothing, act out in the space. Defying logic – and seemingly gravity – these twisted forms imply the essence of a thing. Though awkwardly physical, they convey more closely an unmasked feeling, the raw material of the self.

Landon O'Brien's sculptural work lends the show a wry humor. In *Deep Drip*, a postcard of a cave dweller is nailed to a block of resin atop a CD case, topped with a seedpod, like a cherry on an absurdist's sundae.

At the gallery's far end are four large photographs of men by Christa Blackwood. Printed as film positives, their translucent bodies sway against the wall. The series, titled *Boy Play*, shows the men awash in seductive pinks and blues, while the wall behind them lends their skin an oddly three-dimensional stippled texture. While the colors are playful, the "boys" themselves appear dour or posed beyond playfulness. A quiet discomfort exists between the reality of their bodies and what's projected onto them. It calls to mind the awkward question, "Are we having fun yet?"

The pieces by Ron Geibel invite almost too great a sense of playfulness. In *Single User*, row upon row of porcelain bobbles are lined up on the floor. Like a legion of door knobs or breasts or wind-up tops, these objects want to be in the hand. Each piece lists to one side like an injured body or some vague reminder of disembodied parts, but collectively they create a compelling force. In the context of this mass, the three glazed porcelain works *Untitled* (decoy no.9), *Untitled* (decoy no.4), and *Untitled* (decoy no.10) do feel like decoys, as though they were masquerading. Made up of smaller forms, reminiscent of bullets or acorns, these figures are piled together in a shape that vaguely resembles the individual parts that compose it.

A pleasing emphasis on material and a sense of immediacy to the show as a whole make the work feel present, but also as if it were moving or growing into something else. Perhaps this is the result of the artists themselves being in motion, compelled into their work by the sort of feedback that allows a body to grow.

An artist talk will take place Sat., Aug. 25, 2pm, at grayDUCK.

"Crit Group 2018"

grayDUCK Gallery, 2213 E. Cesar Chavez, 512/826-5334, www.grayduckgallery.com
Through Sept. 2