

the arts

Red Left, Blue Right

GrayDUCK group show examines the degree to which the art object affects the senses

REVIEWED BY MATTHEW IRWIN, FRI., JUNE 7, 2013

'Red Left, Blue Right'

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Through June 16

On the surface, grayDUCK Gallery's "Red Left, Blue Right" poses the same challenge as any themed group exhibition: Does the premise present useful obstructions or utter distractions to the artistic process?



Double Blocks, by Phillip Edward Niemeyer

Neither outcome is necessarily better than the other.

The only disappointment might be a work that meets the show's technical requirements without achieving anything particularly interesting or unexpected. The work is an exercise.

On the surface, "Red Left" isn't much different from any themed group show of its caliber. But we're not working on the surface. We're moving within the idea of how depth affects perception, visually and philosophically.

The title refers to the classic anaglyph method of imitating a 3-D object by providing the eyes with two images, filtered by color: red for the left eye, blue for the right. The filters in 3-D glasses send the images to the visual cortex, which, in its confusion, interprets the difference as depth.

More than any other device used to soften viewers' imagination in entertainment, 3-D imaging actually can provide information otherwise absorbed into the surface of a 2-D image. This might be particularly useful for identifying the flaws in Tony Stark's perfect complexion ... er, I mean in an organic cell. In "Red Left," however, the suggestion of a multidimensional image also tends to obscure corporeal details.

The pinnacle of this show appears in the form of a joke, by the show's curator, Phillip Edward Niemeyer. *Double Blocks* are (roughly) two-inch by two-inch woodblocks with the images of 3-D blocks appearing on the sides in red and blue. It's so meta, right? But Niemeyer's pieces also speak to the concept of 3-D itself. They hold the representation of depth equal to actual depth, or, in other terms, utter distraction equal to useful obstruction. Moreover, the woodblocks themselves are difficult to see through the violently clashing colors.

We might look at *Double Blocks* as a statement on how we view visual art: Are we fascinated with the object or the ideas the object contains? If the immersion is sensory alone, I'm probably not that interested. Sure, emotion and intellect are accessed and inspired by the senses, but it's the degree to which the senses serve or distort meaning that makes them valuable, and likewise the degree to which the art object affects the senses.

Niemeyer's contribution contains one more twist. The blocks on the blocks aren't 3-D as far as the 3-D glasses are concerned. Rather they imitate a block one could stack another illusionary block on top of, the glasses create a flashing electric violet field that's impossible to hold onto with the eyes.

The vision makes me feel disoriented and a little afraid, like looking through a porthole into an as-yet undefined dimension.