

# Star-Telegram

FORT WORTH

February 26, 2006

## New galleries offer restrained chaos and genuine delights

Author: Titus O'Brien



Tripe and Old Lace (2006) by Victoria Reynolds, oil on panel

Is the Dallas Design District the new art center?

New galleries are opening every few months in this area just west of downtown, and a trip here makes for an easy afternoon diversion or collector's roundup.

Holly Johnson Gallery opened last summer, and Johnson's aesthetic is adding a distinctive voice to the Dallas scene. Leaning toward the painterly, Johnson's artists also tend toward the decorative. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it poses challenges.

Take the current body of work from Houston-based Virgil Grotfeldt. He has developed a cool technique using coal dust, which looks essentially like Sumi ink and is applied evocatively on linen and metallic-coated paper. His attempt to re-approach gestural abstraction is oddly concurrent with New Yorker Charline Von Heyl, whose show "Concentrations" recently ended at the Dallas Museum of Art. The other artist you can't help but think of is Sigmar Polke, who, on a grander scale, tossed ground moon rocks and asteroids on metallic, polymer-covered canvas.

It's this latter comparison that highlights my concerns with these paintings. They flirt with chaos, with many drips and squiggles and bold gestures, but the result is always reined in, in favor of a snail-and-butterfly-infested, underwater-y flowered landscape formula that is repeated work after work. The scale of each is modest and discreet, the format rectangular and upright, varying only slightly. There are no surprising departures from his self-delineated routine: If this gesture goes here, this mark goes there, and then this one here. Maybe inspired by the more chaotic backgrounds, and some of the smaller, Anselm Kiefer-y, cosmic-looking prints, I wanted to just shake the paintings up like an Etch-a-Sketch and let some more chance weirdness fall in. I often sort of feel the same about the Holly Johnson Gallery.

A few blocks away, I dropped in on Marty Walker as she finished the installation of her inaugural show. She's returning after a few years away from the art world and inevitable postgraduate-school disillusionment. She's mustered not only her confidence and resources, but a nice stable of artists that span a number of generations and aesthetics. Dallas stalwarts Tom Orr, Frances Bagley and Ted Kincaid are seen here, as well as former Angstrom Gallery regular Mark Flood of Houston. Jody Lee, Victoria Reynolds and Robert Boland round out the roster.

The show is a bit of a hodgepodge, as group shows tend to be, but each work holds up well on its own. There are nice synchronicities too, many of them revolving around notions of the body. Reynold's astoundingly rendered paintings of meat and tripe converse with Lee's prints made with the actual innards themselves. Bagley's Braided

Rug anchors the room with 644 feet of woven human hair. Flood finally busts out of the rectangle with Ovular, my favorite painting of his, ever.

And look in the back room to see Tom Orr reinvent himself. Thumbprint #1 is a large print created by repeating a blown-up fragment of the artist's own thumbprint into a gorgeous, eerie pattern that would vie with the most intricate Islamic tile mosaic. It's an exciting direction for him, and it demonstrates how an artist can make a successful, radical departure at any stage of a career.