

Art Barhopping

Sifting through artsy-schmooze

Just moments after last call is announced, as the clock is striking two in the morning, I realize: The longer I gaze at this piece of crap on the wall, the more I start to like it — that is, until I'm done urinating. Then it's back to crap. Welcome to the wonderful, relatively unskilled sport of binge drinking and art critiquing. It's nothing new: Where there is art (yes, even in close proximity to urinals — Marcel Duchamp would be proud), there are critics. It's just that with the increasingly prolific artistic community (and Eugene is not short on art-makers of all stars and stripes) comes a demand for more wall space for gallery shows. Once mostly limited to urban coffeeshops and upscale restaurants, the trend of mixing art shows with businesses (extra credit if they serve wine) has exploded in the area. Art bars are one of the newer hybrids of this meeting of booze and visual stimuli.

The three prominent art bars downtown include Jameson's, Horsehead and Diablo's Downtown Lounge. While the latter two are sure to alert *EW* of upcoming shows, Jameson's has been negligent in notifying us of its exhibits. Which is a shame, really, because it features the most unified show currently on display, a show that reflects well on Jameson's clientele, its atmosphere and its other wall art. My

evening of critical art reviewing while under the influence began at Diablo's, perhaps offering clues to my conclusions.

Currently on display at **Diablo's** are works of imaginative portraits and narratives by **Scott Boyes**. Maybe it was the gin and tonic scouring my throat, but his "Adams Family" portrait of Gomez and Morticia Addams angered me. Being an Adams myself makes me wish people would get the spelling straight. To make matters more ridiculous, the art is hung around the pool table lounge, making it extremely difficult to ponder aesthetics with the constant threat of a hustler bending over and ramming his cue into your pancreas. Ouch!

And pool cues aren't the only threat. As I contemplate a portrait of a snide celery stalk, an errant pool ball jumps the table and ricochets off the piece as if it were some sort of protective wall panel. The hustlers are smirking and beside themselves with amusement. I, however, have had enough of this mockery.

Stepping into the **Horsehead**, it's immediately clear I will need something potent — perhaps a vodka Rockstar — to digest **Preston Schmidt's** half-finished, would-be



Mikey Straub's art hangs at Jameson's

masterpieces straight out of a high school art class. They clash in stomach-turning fashion with the Horsehead's regular stable of horse and darkly hued bar scene paintings, a collection of images that fits nicely with both the theme and kitsch factor of the bar.

At one point my eye fixates on the transom window leading to the Horsehead's magically illuminated sanctuary-esque roof. You know the art has failed when a view through a window upstages it. Besides, the art is annoyingly displayed above the booths, making it uncomfortable to look at if more attractive subjects occupy

said booths. I want to stick around and chat (maybe even about the art on the wall), but it's getting nigh on one in the morning, and I still have one more art bar on my list.

Jameson's has obviously done its homework: The bar selected artwork that melds with its interior decorating and color scheme. The art by **Mikey Straub** (mostly portraits of violently distressed figures and stuffed animals) nicely complements the poster of a bowling Richard Nixon behind the bar. One minor distraction is the Pollock-inspired work hanging in the corner nook. While perhaps stunning by itself, the piece (pictured at left) is too bright and fun-in-the-sun for this art critic's wobbly eyes. But overall Straub's art is eye-appealing, easily seen from a distance and urges patrons to comment — which they do with gusto.

To wit: A trio of intoxicated lay art critics huddle around a painting of a creepy man who peers out from behind bulging eyes; one of the guys gesticulates wildly (sometimes touching or rubbing the painting for emphasis). "It's not for nothing." "Is that Steve Buscemi?" "Look at this, look, dude, just look." I want to step in with my own bit of artspeak, but last call is announced, my bladder is bursting and some of this art is looking pretty good.

EW

Diablo's Downtown Lounge Work by Scott Boyes, through March 28. 11am-2:30am M-F; 3pm-2:30am Sa-Su. 959 Pearl St. **Horsehead Bar** "No Apologies," work by Preston Schmidt, through March 31. 11:30am-2:30am daily. 99 W. Broadway. **Jameson's** Work by Mikey Straub, through March 31. 4pm-2:30am daily. 115 W. Broadway.



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