



Family Matters

Exhibit questions the familiar

Outside of Feinstein's Museum of Unfine Art it's snowing clusters of flurry flakes, which are falling and clinging to the streets like wet naps. In walks some dude, shaking his head to get the moisture off his stringy hair. "You still accepting family art?" the dude asks Sean Mediaclast, local DJ, artist, curator and proprietor of Feinstein's. "Sure," says Mediaclast. "You got it with you?"

"It's in my car," says the dude. "I'll go get it."

Within five minutes Mediaclast has hung the dude's work on the wall of his music and clothing shop, complete with a handwritten title card. "I could probably take on about 10 to 15 more reasonably sized works," says Mediaclast, in addition to the more than 30 works already nailed to the wall in herky-jerky fashion. Like the family unit, the show is a work in progress, an ongoing open exhibition of paintings, prints, sculpture, found art and collage culled from drop-off submissions such as the one I witnessed while reviewing the show.

Mediaclast says he was curious how the family theme would be interpreted or defined, if at all. Indeed, he says he wondered how someone who desired a family (or a "family" as subject matter) would go about creating one. The answer is straightforward and abstract, figurative and ephemeral.

Peter Herley's *Family on a Couch* falls into the latter category by piling an assortment of dolls, stuffed animals and action figures on a couch and snapping a "family portrait." The desolate stare of these children's toys give the portrait a melancholy touch, making the ephemeral stand-in for what we idealize as "family." Similarly *Dragon's Treasure* by Lisa Degraffenreid collects an iridescent blue-green dragon doll nuzzling its button-cute offspring. The figure is simultaneously nurturing and primal, a toy and an isolated sample.

In a work of simple beauty, David P. Miller's *Family Monument* is an assemblage of stone-carved figures (the family) in a window-frame box, standing under their flimsy shelter in a thunderstorm. A simple beauty, sure, but not a simple image: Blue spheres dot the outside of the box, suggesting a cosmic order, while pillowy-soft thunderclouds belie the benevolence of a climate tempered by gods. If Michelangelo's *Prisoners* are heavy metal, *Family Monument* is soft rock.

Some artists interpret family in other-



Clockwise from upper left: *American Gothic II* by Scott Boyes, *Good Afternoon* by Andy Helps and a detail from *Family Monument* by David P. Miller

worldly terms, like Scott Boyes' *American Gothic II*, which re-imagines the Grant Wood painting with empty vessel aliens standing obliquely against a spare green plain and a single red brick house. Boyes' digital "painting" further distances the image from human warmth, giving it an eerie dread.

Steve LaRiccia's *Same Sex Marriage* is a study in repression. LaRiccia fashions two Art Deco-era found objects (they look like pieces from a vacuum), both with three-inch tube openings. However, one of the tube holes is plugged up with cork. No matter how many times I look at this piece, its answer is both obvious and elusive. Is LaRiccia playing with the words "same sex" to connote boredom? Is this commentary on how some have the right to speak while others are censored? Yes, to both and all questions raised by the work, for it leads you into questions with no given answers.

Contrast that with Kathy Omlin's *Family Defined Metaphorically*, a mixed media collage, which seems to posit the question "Can family be defined outside of blood?" and comes up with a neat display but fails to really grapple with the question in the visual work itself.

Elsewhere in the show, Andy Helps' pointillist *Good Afternoon* is straightforward homage to the sort of idealistic family of the 1950s that came prepackaged with diamond necklaces, blonde curls, blue skies and a bouquet of flowers while Eric Syverson's *My Brother* shows Stephen Hawking set against a backdrop of interstellar space, as if to imply a higher order of family, those great artists and thinkers we are not related to by blood but which, nevertheless, we find true kinship with across ages and eons.

"The Family Show" is on display through Feb. 14.

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