



By Alyson B. Stanfield

FCMOCA Exhibit Questions Artworld Conventions

Juhl Wojahn's exhibition at the Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art will leave you wondering which objects on the gallery's walls are part of the structure and which are the artist's contributions to the installation.

"complicit" is set in a stark space complete with cold, gallery-white walls and an equally icy concrete floor. There is nothing in this room that makes

you want to sit down and enjoy the art for awhile; nothing that compels you to stay. Except, of course, the intriguing devices all around. They are artworks constructed from everyday, recognizable objects such as light bulbs, television sets, and electrical cords. You begin to question why the artist has put certain materials together and what they might mean to him and to you. Take your cue from the helpful gallery notes: in order to comprehend the art, you must become a participant (or be "complicit") in Wojahn's installation.

Upon entering the gallery, you immediately notice an electrical cord linking a meter on one wall to a light bulb aimed at the opposite wall. After pushing the button on the meter, the bulb lights up for six seconds and illuminates its own outlet. The gallery notes explain that this sculpture, "Diagram," "serves as a metaphor for the presentation methods that museums and galleries use to guide a viewer through an experience with art." It is a fitting introduction to the rest of the show.

One would almost have to be an insider to fully appreciate the irony of the work or to understand the swipes Wojahn takes at the unwritten rules governing the art world.

This is exemplified by the deliberately annoying "Moderator," a recorded voice that spews quotes lifted from art publications and controlled by a motion sensor on the wall. The viewer is led to believe that he or she is in command of the experience (just stand in front of the sensor, right?), but the quotes are often cut off. "The romantic myth of the artist as diabolical is also consciously exploited by artists as an attempt ..." or "... past conventions, originality can be considered qualitatively by examining the distance that art allows the viewer to travel." These incomplete thoughts are maddening.

Artists have a love/hate relationship with art writers and critics. They need writers to publish their work in order to build up résumés and accumulate articles for their portfolios, but they would much rather the work be appreciated on its own merits—

without others' words and interpretations. "Moderator" brilliantly addresses this. Even I, who write and read about art, wanted to cut out the moderator's tongue so that I

could experience the other works as they had been intended.

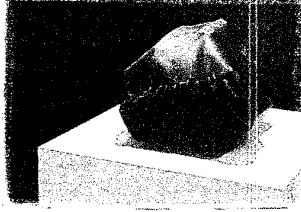
What is more frustrating: being told how to look at art or being guided only momentarily before being cut off from the source of information? Point taken.

"Fetish" is a clever observation on how we give value to art

objects. It consists of a paint tray, circular saw, paint roller, and other tools of the sculptor all tightly packaged within a semi-transparent piece of roughly sewn rawhide. It is the only object in the room that has organic qualities and appears handcrafted rather than machine-made. Another viewing leads to the conclusion that the artist is honoring the white museum pedestal on which the rawhide package is placed. The pedestal, a typical way of displaying art objects, has become the fetish or obsession rather than the art itself.

In contrast to the mostly monochromatic palette of the rest of the exhibition, "Presence/Absence" seduces you with its color. Ten red-orange workshop lamps dangle from the ceiling and face a convex mirror on the wall. The lights are at about eye level, but vary in height as would people in a room. When the button on the mirror is pressed, the bulbs light up and recorded voices from a crowd suddenly fill up the gallery. As you look into the mirror, you are no longer viewing the sculpture, but have become a participant and are surrounded by others. More to the point, as with the other pieces in the exhibit, you have completed the artistic process.

In a sense, "Moderator" epitomizes the entire exhibit. The works are all about the lack of control, the artist's and the viewer's, over how artwork is usually viewed and experienced. They are about institutional control of artists' objects. That is, how a museum or gallery lights an artwork, how it is placed on a pedestal or how closely it can be viewed before an alarm goes off. Wojahn allows viewers to control these aspects of "complicit," but he is ultimately the only one in control. **W**



"Fetish": It's all about control.

Juhl Wojahn: complicit
Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art
Old Post Office Building
201 S. College Avenue
970.482.2787
Tuesday-Friday, 10-6, Saturday 12-5
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