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Yahav-Brown offers art that will make you laugh

By **David Bonetti**

POST-DISPATCH VISUAL ARTS CRITIC

Wednesday, Mar. 15 2006

The lying liars Danny Yahav-Brown exposes in this hilarious exhibition are not the right-wing politicians Al Franken lacerated in his hilarious book, and the lies they tell have nothing to do with fictive weapons of mass destruction. Yahav-Brown, a conceptual artist, seems to be proposing that artists are in fact lying liars and that the lies they tell are the objects they create: art.

But of course. We have long since given up expecting art to tell the literal truth - just as we have given up on art as a delivery system for beauty.

Deconstructionists have gone out of their way to show us that the most convincing realism is a fiction composed of a set of unquestioned conventions. Truth lies in the unmasking. And burlesque, satire, crude humor and intellectual pranks are among the techniques used to find the real truth beneath surface appearance.

Yahav-Brown uses those techniques and more -punning, adolescent sexual humor, slapstick, reversal and outright stealing.

Not to leave out lying. In "All the Lies I Have Ever Told," Yahav-Brown covers a sheet of typewriter paper with the title phrase, suggesting that the list is endless. Done, he shapes the sheet into a paper airplane and sticks it into the gallery wall, making it look as if the sheet was so sharp that it pierced the wall. Of course, it also suggests that the artist who confesses his sins of prevarication is not really bothered by it at all - having confessed, he throws it away.

Yahav-Brown's destabilization of expectations turns into high gear with the gallery's front desk: a white, drawerless modernist table. He has taken off a pair of legs, creating an image that suggests that the table has suddenly collapsed. The wine bottles of his opening and the announcements for his show lie in a wine puddle (made of epoxy) on the floor.

One of his naughtiest pieces is a pair of identical color photographs hung on facing walls. The large images focus on the crotch of a person wearing a pair of jeans. Out of each zipper dangles a finger. Expectations are upset. And outrage and surprise give way to the pleasure that comes from experiencing a fresh visual wit.

The funniest piece in this funny show is the video "The Way Things Go (Backwards)." The neo-dada Swiss team Fischli & Weiss made an extremely funny video some 20 years ago titled "The Way Things Go." In this half-hour of controlled mayhem, ordinary objects - pails, wheels, screens, balls - are set up in elaborate sequences so that once an action has been initiated at one end, its unbroken chain reaction continues through to the other. Yahav-Brown has run Fischli & Weiss' video backward, and, it may be even funnier in reverse.

Yahav-Brown's exhibition continues only through Saturday, so make an effort to see it: You might get a laugh or two as a reward.

Leora Laor

Yahav-Brown was born and raised in Israel, but his work isn't identifiably

"Israeli." Israeli photographer Leora Laor lives in Jerusalem, and her subjects are Israeli, so that makes her work literally "Israeli," although her intentions - to document a lifestyle, to create timeless imagery out of daily life - are the intentions of artists who live in many places.

Her new work shows a romantic sensibility, filtered through post-modernist distancing effects, that is mature in its vision and realization.

In one body of work, Laor made still images of people in a public park in Jerusalem that she had clandestinely taped on digital video. The small figures, photographed from a great distance, possess the timeless quality of people from biblical stories. The golden light suggests Italian cinema from the postwar period, and the figures seem to be occupying stage sets. One image of four women in long dresses is reminiscent of paintings by French Barbizon painter Millet.

In her other series of digital photographs, Laor again takes pictures of unsuspecting people. This time her subjects are Orthodox Jewish women, who in their long dresses and scarves look as if they are from another age. In one print, a girl with friends looks back toward the photographer, catching her at her game. The girl looks unsettled, but she offers no menace.

'Danny Yahav-Brown: Lies, and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them'

Where: William Shearburn Gallery, 4735 McPherson Avenue

When: Through Saturday

Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday

How much: free

More info: 314-367-8020 or ww.shearburngallery.com

Leora Laor

Where: Ellen Curlee Gallery, 1308A Washington Avenue

When: Through March 30.

Hours: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday

How much: free

More info: 314-241-1299 or ww.ellencurleegallery.com

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