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Arts review: A Raleigh-ite does Durham's Third Friday

Posted by **Todd Morman** on Fri, Mar 28, 2014 at 3:54 PM

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PANIC at the Carrack Modern Art

courtesy of the Carrack

Before you judge me for never having made the drive from Raleigh to Durham's **Third Friday** gallery hop until last week, or for having had only the vaguest guess before last weekend about what the **Scrap Exchange** actually looked like, I have a good excuse.

RTP.

Seriously. While Research Triangle Park arguably had a point back in the '60s, when plopping tech businesses in an open field counted as progress, today it functions in the cultural life of the Triangle primarily as a gaping black hole that does nothing but interfere with the cross-pollination between artists and audiences that would be much more possible if downtown Raleigh, Durham and Carrboro were 8 miles closer together. We can only pray that someday, RTP will become filled with cheap housing that attracts the artists, bicyclists and queer folks essential to creating that

kind of fertile ground.

That's my excuse for never going to the Scrap Exchange before last weekend.

Closest to Raleigh and first on the bill was **Golden Belt**, which I had no idea was actually an odd complex of insurance companies, loft apartments and galleries. Immediately lost and trying to meet Internet pals, I found friendly help at the **LabourLove** gallery, where the owner couple gave me directions to the spots I should be sure to hit.

First up was Building 3, immediately bringing to mind Raleigh's **Artspace**. There was no time to wander the individual studios to schmooze in search of the good stuff, so I slid past the a cappella group in the hall to Room 100 for "Dwelling," **Jacqueline Dulin's** strikingly colorful and gently repetitive Kosovo House series. The sharp lines and clearly defined blocks of color work beautifully against the obvious abstraction waiting to burst its limits. The tension becomes even clearer when you check the more abstract works at her site for comparison.

Next we went to **Liberty Arts Foundation**, the non-profit studio/foundry in a huge warehouse with high ceilings and lots of industrial equipment. Its gallery was small, and featured work from the members in what appeared to be a very lightly curated show—no theme, not a lot of thought beyond "hey, let's feature members." There's nothing wrong with that, and I know curating takes a lot of time, but after traveling from Raleigh, it was a little disappointing. Luckily, the disappointment was wiped away when I noticed a woman across the warehouse working next to a huge metal sculpture and found her to be engaging and informative—just what you want at an open studio night. **Jackie MacLeod** was happy to talk about her work, the **Bull City Sculpture Show** coming in May and the handrail she'd built mostly from found metal for the steps in Durham Central Park.

Sarah E. Dale's "Re:circled" show next door at The Scrap Exchange looked interesting online, so I dragged the Internet pals down the ramp to check it out. What a delightful, sprawling mess. Kids running around, all kinds of craft and industrial materials, tunnels through the shelves with signs saying "Don't feed the trolls." I'm kicking myself for not visiting sooner. The gallery featured Dale's almost psychedelic sculptures made from plastic lids, rehydrated paint and other dingy materials from her recycle bin. The pieces placed against backgrounds work better than those simply put on the wall, and the best piece was a diptych with a split background that gave it much more depth.

We got lost again trying to find **SPECTRE Arts**, but another stop at LabourLove put us on the right track to the little white church with a New Orleans Mardi Gras photo exhibit. It's easy to fall into cynicism about Mardi Gras as a tired subject for art, but the mostly black-and-white photos were rich, smartly composed snapshots of the cultural mix of the city.

Rushing west to the downtown loop landed us at **The Carrack Modern Art**, where a co-worker was part of an improv evening, playing free jazz while a female and male dancer pulled and pushed each other around, and *Indy* contributors Lightsey Darst and Chris Vitiello sat at a typewriter with their stream-of-consciousness writing projected on a large screen. The interplay between the dancers and the musicians was fantastic; the dancers' athleticism was interesting enough, but the way they rapidly improvised a relationship to the musical changes was deeply impressive. I only got to see Vitiello writing before we rushed off, but there were moments of serendipity when phrases like "some time lost/due to repetition" and "this has been hard on all of us" engaged the music perfectly, even if others, like an exhortation to speed the music up to pump up the room, fell a bit flat.

We'd been told **Pleiades Gallery** was a must-visit and the Internet pals, starting to fade a bit, gamely followed me there. The Sandra Elliott/Jim Adams dual show (called "Dwell" in an odd coincidence with Jacquelin Dulin at Golden Belt) is wonderful; Elliott's large abstract paintings and Adams' gorgeous curved sculptures with titles referencing the 2008 mortgage disaster were a solid pairing. Pleiades is another collective space, owned by 10 artists who share the rent, and will definitely be on my list of stops at future Third Fridays. As an added bonus, I got to share thoughts with a number of Chapel Hill and Durham luminaries, including Jim Kellough, who used to run the Modern Museum, one of the first and most fun art galleries in downtown Durham back in the early '90s.

That's the kind of cross-pollination the gaping cultural hole of RTP prevents from happening more often. More than one gallery owner told me they were looking forward to the 2015 opening of the 21C chain of "boutique hotel and contemporary art museum" projects in downtown Durham. John at LabourLove told me he was in Louisville when the first one opened, and says the infusion of upscale money really helped the gallery scene there. We'll see.

But what the Triangle art scene really needs? A few artistic types opening up cool galleries in the desert of RTP.

Tags: **Durham Third Friday, Carrack, Pleiades, SPECTRE Arts, Scrap Exchange, RTP, Golden Belt, LabourLove, Liberty Arts Foundation, art review, Image**

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