
Left: Glen Speirs, *Mini-slugger Mace*, plastic novelty bat, nails and cedar
Right: Glen Speirs, *Saw-Blade Mace*, saw blade, plastic furniture leg

**4 cast**

new directions, traditional forms

Featuring artwork by Rich Houck, Thomas Kijak, Dolores Kirschner and Glen Speirs

May 21 – June 30, 2011 • Guest curated by Ron Schita
Award thinking

For this exhibit I have selected a cast of four artists whom I feel are forward thinking and work both with and against tradition. They still exist within the time-honored genres of sculpture, ceramic, and painting, and they explore modes of thought more attuned to the complexities of contemporary life without repeating or copying the successes of prior generations.

Rich Houck is a contemporary easel painter, and although he works within a variety of subject matters, he has created an interesting series of abstracted acrylic paintings dealing with the properties of light in nature. In many of these works, some quite large, he flattens the distance between foreground and background, firmly keeping the image in the realm of physical paint. The light behind the branches in one, for example, is treated with as much attention as the branches, or central image, which in some instances is pure design combined with intoxicating brushwork. Light, dark, front and behind are all equally represented as part and parcel of an encompassing visual experience.

Tom Kijak is as much a visual poet as he is an artist. A very heartfelt and kinetic person, his allover mixed media paintings and drawings are direct transcriptions of what he feels and experiences. Somewhat akin to a psychedelic Jackson Pollock mixed with graffiti tags and obscure collage elements, these pieces are energetic and spontaneous with a youthful social consciousness. His many drawings, which he calls “Diner Doodles,” are done on the backs of paper placemats that are found everywhere in roadside eateries, and with affinities to Kerouac and Crumb express his observations while dining.

The ceramics and installation work of Dolores Kirschner adapt the technique of kiln-fired objects. However, their function remains purely esoteric, with bottles that won’t hold fluid, bowls that are meant for containing ideas, and physically imposing tiles that are closer to sculpted painting than ceramic with an intentionally archaic sensitivity. Her surfaces are rough hewn and extremely tactile, and they sit solidly within the here and now. They seem to refer to organic shapes in the marine or animal kingdoms and boldly refuse to accept any allusion to perfection.

Glen Speirs’ sculpted series of homemade maces approaches the idea of an ancient weapon used as an artistic device for social or conceptual commentary. The maces are made of articles such as chair legs, tools, welded metal rods, aluminum chains and baseball bats. A circular saw blade is attached to the arm of a chair, or a transmission gear, to a baseball bat. He questions the intentions of artists, the purposes and meanings of the items displayed, and ironically, how anything can be used as a weapon, even art.

The very act of creating an artwork carries with it centuries of tradition and calls into question whether tradition itself is a property of art. The four artists represented in this show are long-standing members of the Reading-Berks art community, as both gallery owners (Kirschner, Clay on Main; and Speirs, Gallery 908) and artists (Houck and Kijak). They look to go beyond the tried and true and produce art that is risky, challenging, personal and indicative of the directions that art can take in this area.

—Ron Schira, Art Critic

Tom Kijak, My Half-Assed Attempt toward reality, mixed media