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Eye Exam
Winter Tour

Michael Workman

Despite the nasty weather, a lot of people were out Friday night. Hunkered down in the offices behind Bucket Rider Gallery at about seven that evening, I was flanked on all sides by the Bad At Sports team of Duncan Macenzie, Richard Holland and Amanda Browder. We were recording an interview for their podcast (online at <http://badatsports.libsyn.com>) scheduled to run after the first of the year. If you haven't heard it, stop what you're doing and go listen, these guys are doing excellent stuff. After about an hour of discussion, we packed up the laptop and microphones and departed the West Loop in Browder's truck, destination 65 Grand and the new show of work by Michelle Faust, "Masturspace 2750." Up two sets of narrow stairs in this dingy building is the cleaned-up apartment space at the top, a single room with a kitchen and a few track lights on the ceiling. Simple and sufficient. At first blush, Faust's show looks like two different artists, divided half into graphite drawings and rusted metal wall pieces decorated with tufts of human hair. Her graphite drawings are the stronger of the two, astronauts floating in outer space attached by tethers to their tubelike spacecraft. It's not until you take a closer look that you notice her spacemen aren't just floating there: they're actually indulging every sexual act imaginable: masturbation, fellatio, anal penetration. This impossible sexuality connects the wall hangings through absurd biotechnical statement: sex in a vacuum of human recognition is just mechanical, emotionless fucking.

Next stop on the West Town Gallery Network tour was 40000 on Winchester, and Brian Andrews' "The Family Hominidae." Recently relocated to San Francisco, this was Andrews' first solo show in the town where he was educated, and his work bears the symptoms of that transition. In the front room are a series of x-ray-like pieces that combine infant skeletons with those of animals, garish images of skeletons with wings or multiple limbs. Across from these are large-scale



bud light nights

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images of wilting sunflowers, their larger-than-life browned petals drooping with all the weight of senescence and decay. Nicely done, but I've seen it before. Disappointing, given the immense potential of Andrews' earlier work. I expect more of this artist, and wasn't rewarded for that expectation until I saw his photographs restaging scenes from "Bambi" using taxidermy stand-ins for the beloved woodland character. It wasn't until this last series that his questions of "classification, extinction, modernity and ancestors," finally clicked with this context of guileless encounters with unsympathetic, often brutal animal realities. Andrews comes across as a cynic in these works, but his project-room installation begs the question. In it, the disco ball that fills the room with swirling lights also blocks his face in the projected self-portrait.

Cabin-feverish and itching for more art, my wife Marie and I packed up our one-year old son Tristan the following night and set out to view the "Miniatures and Multiples" show at Around the Coyote Gallery. We were excited about the show since discussing it with Michael Pajon earlier that afternoon at Tony Fitzpatrick's studio sale on Damen Avenue. Pajon works as Fitzpatrick's studio assistant, and his miniature prints show all the talent and imagination of a budding ace. His ghoulish scenes deftly depict the gloom of poverty as horrific, mythologized instances of rape, death and a literal siege of bad omens. Robert Burnier's "Fracture 16 Explosion in Four Parts" is also garishly delightful. In a gridded series of miniature paintings, he presents the possibility of nuclear decimation as stages of "Thermonuclear Explosion," a "Guided Missile Test," an "Iraqi Oil Fire" and the destruction of the "Space Shuttle Challenger." Bleak stuff rendered in hypnotic colors, as if merely the shifting intensity of a twilit sky. Topping off our visit to the ATC Gallery, while browsing the show, our son waddled unnoticed over to Cameron Crawford's tiny balsa wood, glue, stain and paint piece, "Old House." Snatching with his stubby little fingers the delicate wood cube from atop its plinth, we watched in horror as he raised the \$500 piece above his head and gleefully hurled it smashing against the floor. It's a sentiment I've longed to express many times before and, while sympathetic, felt that neither Crawford's art, nor our bank account--especially our bank account--was deserving of such savagery. Bad, bad boy.

(2005-12-13)

Also by Michael Workman

Eye Exam

Miami's market convergence comprises a center of the art world around Art Basel Miami, the main event, an