

ART ON THE EDGE



Untold stories: Inventive clay sculpture by Joel Mesnikoff, a graduate student in the ceramics program at Cranbrook Academy of Art, prods viewers into conjuring up their own narrative.

Artist crafts story without end

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
SPECIAL WRITER

Joel Mesnikoff sculpts interlocking clay vessels and invented implements to provoke viewers into creating a narrative based on their experiences. Mesnikoff exhibits his stimulating work as part of "New Generation: the first annual graduate exhibition," through July 19 at Habitat/Shaw Gallery, 32255 Northwestern Hwy., Suite 25, Farmington Hills.

"I like how minimal they are and the way the implement works within the vessel. They're very strong pieces," said gallery director Jeff Guido in reference to work from Mesnikoff's latest series, "Implements in Basins."

"One looks at Joel's work and questions what the purpose is. There's an obvious reference to tools."

Black basins cradle implements that look as if they were inherent to the labors of an ancient civilization. The vessels' roughly textured exteriors enhance the crudeness of the implied task.

"I'm interested in objects that speak about the hand. You see the handle; the tools are incomplete as themselves. They call on the viewer to find a use. In doing so they create a story," Mesnikoff said in an interview at the gallery.

"Ultimately I'd like the work to conjure up some sort of narrative: 'Oh, you could use it for this. You could use it for that.' That's when I feel like I'm successful, when they lead a person to speculate about what they are."

According to the Cranbrook Academy of Art graduate student, viewers of the work have ventured guesses that range from devil's tools to cooking utensils.

Mesnikoff's sculpture addresses the relationship of two separate elements coming together to form a whole: a specific tool designed for a particular space in which it carries out a task.

"My work draws on the tradition of objects created for a specific use," said the Bloomfield Hills resident.

Initially his work drew on architectural details and organic forms. The most recent series, begun in December, evolved from concerns discussed with Tony Hepburn, chairman of the ceramics department at Cranbrook. Hepburn asked if Mesnikoff had ever considered working in two parts.

"I took it as a challenge to create sculpture in two parts, the tool or implement and the basin. I'm interested in this place," Mesnikoff said, pointing to the black basin, "where an implement carries out a specific function like a Phillips-head screwdriver, for example. It's entirely specific. It only fits in this certain location, nowhere else. It's a discrete relationship."

Mesnikoff uses this relationship as a vehicle for investigation. He believes it is appropriate to craft invented implements that speak about hand labor in an age in which we are so thoroughly dependent on sophisticated machines which dominate our lives. "Our notions of progress are drawn into question in a world in which the mechanisms created to serve and protect us may also threaten our existence," Mesnikoff said.

From a historical perspective, he thinks machines created during the industrial age to provide goods for the masses enlivened factory workers in boring, repetitious and often dangerous tasks.

"For me personally my work speaks about the labor of my forebears, a labor of necessity," Mesnikoff said. "I feel I've tapped into something that I could spend my life working on, working and reflecting on what I've made."

Born and raised in New York, Mesnikoff has had an on-again, off-again relationship with clay for 22 years but questioned whether a career as an artist working with the material was feasible. The turning point for him came during two years of intense studies at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he worked under artists like George Tiemack.

Mesnikoff has a bachelor of art degree from Marquette University, a bachelor of fine art degree from Kansas City Art Institute, a master's degree in ceramics and a master's degree in art education from Columbia University's Teachers College.

Stinson finds fine 'replacement'



The fun of playing in a band has finally kicked in for former Replacements member Tommy Stinson. His new band, Bash & Pop, has a revised lineup, and Stinson's ready to do his favorite things - playing live and writing songs.

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

After more than 10 years as side-man to Paul Westerberg, fellow ex-Replacement Tommy Stinson is finally learning what it's like to be a frontman. He's formed Bash & Pop and now he's taking his own talent show on the road.

"It does feel good doing something that I created and started," said Stinson with his "one too many cigarettes" voice.

It may feel good but he admits it was harder than he imagined to record Bash & Pop's debut, "Friday Night Is Killing Me."

"It got hard right around the time we made the record. It was a lot more work than I thought," he said.

But now that the album's been released, Stinson is ready to relax on tour.

STREET BEATS

"Now the fun's sort of kicked in. I get to do the stuff I like to do - play live and write songs," he explained.

Bash & Pop is currently on its second tour. (The band will play St. Andrew's Hall on Wednesday, July 14.) This time around, Bash & Pop is gigging with a new lineup. Aside from Stinson and drummer Steve Foley, Bash & Pop now includes bassist Janis Tamaka and lead guitarist Max Butler.

Stinson recruited the two new members after the first leg of Bash & Pop's tour was uncomfortable.

"It just didn't feel like a band. It felt like me, Steve, and a few other guys," said Stinson from his Madison, Wis., stop.

So Stinson and Foley decided to go back to Los Angeles and "take the dice and just roll them." Along with getting veteran West Coast musicians, Stinson got something else: new inspiration.

"It's Janis' first tour. She's having a ball. It's like having a little sister on tour. She saw her first cornfield - not that that's all exciting, but you know what I mean. It takes me back to when I was first on the road," he said.

For the 28-year-old Stinson, that was about 10 years ago. At age 13, he started young with the Replacements - and trouble.

"I was starting to get at an age when I started doing bad things... I was heading toward stealing. I was lucky that I ended up with some sort of a career or lifelong interest," he said.

His mother, who sometimes sees his shows, was grateful too.

"My mother was real supportive. She saw things (get) better with me (after joining the Replacements). She's a pretty happy mom," he said.

As for the Replacements, the band is committed to do three more albums to its label, Warner Bros./Sire records. Westerberg's album "14 Songs" counted as one of those. "Paul's album gets to count as one, but mine doesn't. I didn't have a lawyer at the time," he said.

Bash & Pop performs Wednesday, July 14, with special guests the Dirt Merchants and the Junk Monkeys at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are \$6.50 in advance. Must be 18 with ID to enter. Doors open at 8 p.m. For more information, call 961-MELT or 645-6666.



On his own: Bash & Pop — (clockwise) Tommy Stinson, Janis Tamaka, Max Butler, and Steve Foley — will perform at St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit on Wednesday with the Junk Monkeys and the Dirt Merchants.

Band in harmony

Songwriter moves his music taste into the light



New lineup: The Verve Pipe is (from left) guitarist A.J. Dunning, guitarist/vocalist Brian Vander Ark, drummer Don Brown, and bassist Brad Vander Ark. The band will play the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor on Friday and Lili's in Hamtramck on Saturday.

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Brian Vander Ark, lead singer and songwriter for the Verve Pipe, admits he's compromising his musical tastes to stay in his band. Although most musicians admit to the opposite, he said it's a positive thing.

"(The other members) are more interested in harmony, real melodic songwriting," said the sleepy-sounding Vander Ark, a Royal Oak resident.

Compromising his tastes to follow that route has improved his songs, he said.

"It's not quite as bad to compromise. The songs are more of a pleasure to listen to now. The melodies are sweetened. The writing is toned down. It's less pretentious, less dark."

Apparently, that formula is getting the Lansing-based band the gigs they deserve. This month, the group, who has opened for the Goo Goo Dolls, Toad the Wet Sprocket and the Gin Blossoms, will play a showcase for

record company executives at the legendary CBGB club in New York.

Although a little nervous about playing for industry reps, they're thrilled to perform outside of the Midwest.

"We're just excited about going to the city," said Brad Vander Ark.

The Verve Pipe has toured throughout Michigan and Chicago in support of its first CD "I've Suffered a Head Injury." The CD sold more than 2,000 copies in its first six months of release and has been played on numerous radio stations in Michigan. The College Music Journal has listed the Verve Pipe's album in the top ten for East Lansing or Kalamazoo college radio since February of 1993.

Currently, the band is working on its next CD at Station C studios in Grand Rapids. The quartet said this CD will showcase the growth of Brian Vander Ark's songwriting talent.

See VERVE PIPE, 4B

IN CONCERT

Monday, July 12

MYR RISE
Backbeat Saloon, Keego Harbor, (acoustic rock)
682-1119

INACTV
With Crab Ratz and Delta Children Blues Band at The Ritz, 1015 and Grosse Pointe, 3370 W. Huron, Waterford, (groovy pop/funk)
725-2150

Tuesday, July 13

MYR RISE AND MARY MCQUIRE (ACOUSTIC ROCK)
Mr. B's Farm, Novi.
349-7039

THE DETERMANTS
With The Matrix at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor.
996-8555

Wednesday, July 14

THE CHARM FARM
With Brothwood Recipee at Squeezed, 3370 W. Huron, Waterford, (groovy pop/funk)
682-8250

2 HUMANAS FROM EARTH
Rachio's Coffeehouse, 22010 Harper, St. Clair Shores, (rock)
779-0701

DON'T LOOK NOW JIG BAND
At Lili's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, (traditional)
632-2355

DROPPING NAMES

Featuring Mary McGuire, Julie Kovach and Ron Elman at Gayle's Chocolates, Royal Oak, (rock)
398-0001

HUNK JAZZ ENSEMBLE
Featuring Quincy Stewart at Q Club, 29 S. Saginaw St., Pontiac, (jazz)
334-7411

SOME PEOPLE'S CHILDREN
With The Rivermen at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor.
996-8555

HOPE ORCHESTRA
With The Hand Me Downs at The Ritz, 17580 Roseville, Roseville, Part of live broadcast at midnight on 88.7 FM CMX, (rock)
778-8404

CHEAP THRILLZ
Onbow Lake Roadhouse, 9451 Elizabeth Lake Road, White Lake Township, (rock)
698-1514

Thursday, July 15

RED O
340, 1815 N. Main St., Royal Oak, (roots rock)
589-3344

Featuring Exene Covenka, John Doe, D.J. Bonbrake and Tony Glesney with special guest Dillon Fence at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, (alternative rock)
961-MELT

THE DAD BLASTED
Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor.
996-8555

CHEAP THRILLZ
Onbow Lake Roadhouse, 9451 Elizabeth Lake Road, White Lake Township, (rock)
698-1514

Friday, July 16

LA CASA 8TH ANNIVERSARY SHOW
With Betty Elders at Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 N. Woodward, (at Lone Pine) at Birmingham.
646-4950

FEELTAL NEW ORLEANS
With Backstreet Zydeco, The Radiators, Michael Doucet, Beausoleil, and the Subuders at Chene Park, at Chene and East Jefferson, one mile east of the Renaissance Center, Detroit.
393-0066

BLACK MALL
With Yardboss at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, (rock)
832-2355

STATE THEATRE SUMMER SPLASH
Thurs (reggae) bands at State Theatre, 2115 Woodward, Detroit, (reggae)
961-5451

COSMIC PSYCHOS
With Cokedolls at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit.
961-MELT

PETS ON MEAT
With Formosa Pop at Gitt's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-9292

LIFE ON MARS
With The 27th City and Chrede at Finney's Pub, 3965 Woodward, Detroit.
831-8070

MYR RISE AND MARY MCQUIRE
Hoop's Auburn Hills, (acoustic rock)
373-4744

HOWLING DIABLOS
Q Club, 29 S. Saginaw St., Pontiac.
334-7411

BULLY SUNDAY
Marquee, 6139 E. Seven Mile Road, Detroit, (rock)
366-5633

BREACH
With Ethos at Lili's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck, (acoustic rock)
875-6555

See IN CONCERT, 5B