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Installations at Paragraph gallery create awareness of space

By NICK MALEWSKI
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In a rollicking exhibit at Urban Culture Project's Paragraph gallery, site-specific installations by artists Emily Sall and Rebecca Ward intensify awareness of space through the use of physically flat materials.

Kate Hackman, associate director of the Charlotte Street Foundation (which runs the UCP program), saw similarities in the artists' works and invited them to spend a week executing the installations for this show.

Sall, a graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute, employs vinyl. Ward, who lives in Austin and graduated from the University of Texas, uses electrical tape. Each often applies her chosen medium to interiors in ways that comment on the architecture.

Without doubt, the piece that most directly does this is Ward's flamboyant "Seventeen Is Sharp." Ward took measurements of the space and fed them through a mathematical equation that produced the number 17. She then allowed that number to determine the spacing between the parts.

The visual outcome is rainbow-colored webs that stretch from the wall to the floor and lean at the same angle as the evenly spaced, diagonal lines on the wall.

Making judicious use of the cantilever ceiling, Sall's lively "Shucking and Jiving" presents a linear abstraction seemingly rendered in mid-air. Blue, purple, orange and yellow vinyl sweeps down at varied lengths from overhead as if to reject the flatness of the surface.

On the floor below, the work continues in the form of gray and white stripes that leap down a step and make contact with "Seventeen Is Sharp."

It would be no surprise if viewers got the impression that the art on display belongs to a single artist. Not only are the borders between some of the individual works uncertain, it is also difficult to tell where the work of one artist ends and that of the other begins.

This is especially true of Sall and Ward's jazzy, impromptu collaboration, "Muster and Rally." Along the upper half of the west wall, rectangles composed of black stripes and arranged like incompatible building blocks create the illusion of vibration. Meanwhile, linear and circular fragments of assorted widths and colors freely play at the lower edges.

Sall also is showing three dynamic acrylic paintings on wood. Although they seem to betray the dominant intention of the exhibit to liberate the artistic gesture from the limits of the enclosed support, they do have charm.

"Olla Podrida," a phrase that refers to a stew, resembles what the title suggests. An overlapping jumble of orange, pink and blue geometric shapes possesses all the energy of meat and vegetables brought to a boil.

"Corundum," Ward's projected digital animation, is incongruent with the other works in terms of media, but it does extend her interest in spatial issues. Giant blue grids superimposed over one another appear to slowly rotate in opposite directions, producing the impression of a portal through the wall into another dimension.

The strongest pieces in this show, however, are the installations, which impinge on the viewer's walking room. Nothing makes people more aware of space than when it's taken away.

the show

“Information Is Incidental: New and collaborative work by Emily Sall and Rebecca Ward” continues at Paragraph, 23 E. 12th St., through Aug. 8. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. Thursday and Saturday. For information, call 816-221-5115 or go to www.charlottestreet.org.

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