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'Things to Be Next to' turns ordinary into extraordinary

By Dana Self
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Domesticity is subverted, expanded, contracted and fondly embraced in “Things to Be Next to.”

In this curatorial collaboration, Charlotte Street’s Kate Hackman and Shannon Stratton of Chicago’s Threewalls unite four artists — Warren Rosser and James Woodfill from Kansas City and Peter Fagundo and Alberto Aguilar from Chicago — whose gestalt is analogous to one another without being repetitious.

Rosser’s fabric- and carpet-covered installations are idiosyncratic yet almost compositionally perfect and elegantly refined. They are an upholstered response to Fagundo’s scrappy installation of found-object sculptures lined up against one wall.

Fagundo’s 18 rough and scrubby sculptures, which include his son’s electric blanket and a drawer, are wittily incongruous with lyrical titles such as “the words of god are written in our hearts as desire,” and “I begin to feel night.” And despite the junky nature of the materials, the installation is visually rhythmic and poetic.

Aguilar’s sculpture and photography draw literally from his home. Sculptures made from diminutive children’s chairs (elegant) and a Nerf sword (awkward), and photographs embody home and the familiar.





Photos of columns he's created from things around his house, like stuffed animals and laundry, are mostly witty and tender. "Double Animal Column" and "Tape Through Plane" embrace the warm clutter of domesticity. Yet his pieces are uneven; some simply don't work.

Hackman says all four artists have a painting background, perhaps a sustaining girder for their generally good composition. Rosser's upholstered wood sculptures demonstrate his love of texture, color, design and a good fabric store. They share the compositional rigor of his paintings.

Woodfill's work evokes both stability and experimentation. His "Fragment 1" and "Fragment 2" suggest modernist furniture, and yet the works' deliberate ambiguity and neutrality allow them to reflect and absorb the domestic foundation of the exhibition. "Fragment 2" also incorporates sound sculpture from Aguilar.

Aguilar's sound pieces bind together the entire installation, creating an aural environment in which the works easily commingle. Combining music and voices of his family members, his recordings emphasize the intimacy and beauty of the ordinary, including the music we listen to, the voices of our children and the ambient sounds of our daily lives.

All four artists draw from domesticity's materials, physical space and conceptual ideas. James Woodfill sums it up best. In an e-mail he writes, "Regardless of the nature of my studio, I have always thought of it as an extension of my living space — I spend a lot of time 'living' in it. Hopefully this aspect of the installation helps to articulate the idea that the studio is not 'other than' but an extension of everyday life."

The exhibition travels to Chicago's Threewalls in November.

