

The Wignette

Covering the Best of Kansas City

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Postcards and Robots – A Sight to See

Alexia Lang

Four brand new, large-scale pieces of art will be debuted during First Friday this week.

The Missouri Bank Crossroads Branch, 125 Southwest Boulevard, commissioned the art from Lawrence, Kansas-based artist Jerry Kunkel and Kansas City-based artist Adolfo Martinez. The pieces will appear on the bank's "Artboards."

An Art through Architecture "Art Achievement" project, the Missouri Bank "Artboards" launched fall 2008, when the building's existing double-sided billboards were renovated and converted into a highly visible site for work by area artists.

Jerry Kunkel will present two west-facing images, titled "Memories Are...," which play with ideas of fact and fiction, past and present, the nature of memory and the veracity of photographic representation.

"I've created a narrative in which I refer to and re-locate a specific location," Kunkel said.

With the left billboard, the postcard image and the image of the location to which it compares are exactly the same, as though no time has passed, or as if it has remained "the way we remember it and might wish it remain forever."

On the right billboard, however, the back, or message side of the postcard is presented against a different or changed location, with a gate now obstructing the bucolic path.

Prompted by the postcard's text, Kunkel invites the viewer "to fill in the blanks, conjure a short response and consider what may have transpired."

The title of Adolfo Martinez's playful set of east-facing images is "We are Not in Kansas Anymore." His idea for these Artboards came from an earlier series titled "Los Rovatos."

"'Vato' is pachoco slang for 'dude.' I just added 'ro' to the front of it – 'Rovatos,'" Martinez said. "In the original Los Rovatos, the robots are speaking Spanish and are wearing some 'bling,' but for the billboard images, I changed the background to a Kansas City skyline, with the 'rovatos' beaming down from outer space."

Martinez's two Artboards feature robots pulled from pop culture. While injecting a sense of humor and fantasy into the downtown landscape, this line-up of visitors from different eras and planets also offers a poignant portrait of changing cultural portrayals of the futuristic "other."

Be sure to stop by the Artboards this First Friday, Dec. 3 at 125 Southwest Boulevard.

