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## Artists Critique the Art World with 'Out of the Frying Pan'

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Special to the Star

Aaron Storck's and Lee Piechocki's work in "Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire" at Paragraph Gallery suggests their mutual interest in the state of art, criticism, experimentation and the idea of a mess, loosely defined as challenges in art-making.

By mining their studios and the accumulated objects and ideas there, Storck and Piechocki examine how and why they make art and what it might mean in relationship to the broader idea of contemporary art.

Piechocki repeats a seemingly simple format in most of his paintings. He begins with a gray floor, adds a white table and then various objects. In "Still Life With Black Cat," the pivotal black cat (Piechocki's muse) centers the



composition that includes a dream catcher, black trash bag, red-and-white cloth, nautical painting and other random objects. Piechocki plays with optical relationships — some objects are flat, while some are painted with depth, creating a complex visual plane.

In “I have a Lot of Faith in This Model,” Piechocki makes a 3-D installation of one of his paintings, allowing us to join his experiment of using objects rather than painting them.

Piechocki is influenced by working with Storck, a painter, performance and installation artist whose work is a study in contrasts. For instance, his paintings are beautifully articulated compositions ... of colossal junk piles.

Storck astutely calibrates his mixed media and video pieces. Performing in the character of Artist as Wizard, he sermonizes on the state of art and the process of creation. His videos are canny critiques, designed to underline and undermine the artist as egoistic, mystical shaman.



Storck toes a thin line in “As Artist, Like a Truth Sword” because his Wizard — wearing pink sunglasses and a dirty puffy coat — is aggressive and disturbing, a self-appointed seer, ranting for 12 minutes in a disorganized, bunker-type space. While disquieting, it is a fearless parody of those who claim to speak truth. Storck

isn't afraid to look unbalanced.

Searching to make sense of our piles of stuff, Storck seems to revel in those messes, literally piling them up, while Piechocki subtly parses his own accumulations one object at a time.

In this exhibition, both artists seem to ask: What do we make of the issues we confront as artists and as consumers of the art machine, which is shored up and weighted down by theory, criticism and endless self-reflection?

It's a sharp, smart exhibition in which both artists strive to demystify their own art-making practice