

Art Guys open eyes with unusual display

NICHOLAS DRAKE, Post and Courier, June, 1997



Discoon, 1996, raccoon trophy, mirror tiles, motor, sound

Art can be fun, witty and downright sarcastic - so say the Art Guys.

Their exhibition at the Halsey Gallery at the College of Charleston is a foray into the bizarre and definitely the unconventional. For those who like to walk into the wilder side of art, this exhibit, titled "Hunting and Gathering," houses the remnants of an electrifying double-edged presence. Much of what the duo - Jack Massing and Michael Galbreth - created for Piccolo Spoleto 1997 has evaporated into the ethers of space-time.

One obvious afterburn is an installation work in which the Art Guys drilled holes into a white wall, following the lines of a large drawing. They then inserted matches into each hole, lighting the red-headed series of sticks on the night of the show's opening. In domino fashion, the wall lit up in flames and smoke. A fireman stood by protectively for safety reasons - becoming a part of the happening.

Immediately after the opening at the Halsey, the Art Guys - along with their collected entourage - sauntered over to Physicians Auditorium, where the two gave a sequence of performance art works. They began by kissing everyone in the audience on the cheek, leaving behind red lipstick lips. They also threw their voices - tossing a tape recorder between them playing their prerecorded utterances.

Later on, the Art Guys noisily wrapped the entire audience in plastic wrap, racing about the auditorium frantically stretching the loudly squeaking material. If you think these guys sound a little wacko, they admittedly were a laugh a minute.

By far the strongest showings that night were their video works. One concentrated on the slow motion reality of having milk poured over the Guys, splashing and squirting in abandoned exultation. Got milk?

For those who missed these antics, there are the various installation works, plus a video of these performances, to scrutinize curiously.

The exhibition itself includes assorted multimedia displays that are equally as quirky and humorous as their performances. Besides the large-scale smoky aftermath of the opening night's lighting, there are a large number of conceptually based works that promise to challenge, tickle or offend.

A few pieces deal with food. In "Carrot Wheel," the dynamic pair have pasted a circumference of carrots onto the wall. In another, yellow-orange squares of American cheese have been laid out into a sizable grid. Food as art takes on something of the impertinent.

The Art Guys won't stop there, of course. Much of the show centers around taxidermy, utilizing stuffed animals in bizarre situations and context. "Party Animal," for example, displays an antelope's head off which balloons have been draped. Confetti is scattered about joyously, facetiously overstating the pun.

A few of these stuffed works are interactive, sometimes obnoxiously so. In "I Was Tampered With," a car alarm is inserted into a goat's head. Attuned to a motion sensor, the alarm blares out as strollers near the wall-mounted sculpture. The gallery space resounds with the obnoxious alarm.

In these and so many of the sculptures the Art Guys extend the absurdities of Dadaism, giving them a coat of contemporary paint. They manage this by dealing with and confronting current issues and sensibilities - not those of previous eras.

Whether it is in their use of stuffed animals, tobacco products, fireworks, sex toys or fishing hooks, the Art Guys choose their found objects with care. The kind of care that both provokes and tickles.

In one vividly spray-painted mobile of mannequin parts, large fishing hooks gleam with their pointy sharpness. Titled "Art Guys Fishing Hooks," the hooks threaten to prick anyone reaching to caress the colorful body parts. In the '90s, there is danger in eroticism.

So many of these works make fun of the human condition by shifting context to fellow members of the animal kingdom. "Dry Duck," a small sculpture mounted on a stand, shows a duck applying underarm deodorant. Another such contextual substitution is "Robert Jr." Here a wide-mouthed bobcat growls oddly out at the viewer. It wears a preppie outfit, including a plaid tie and appropriate shoes.

There is something of Jonathan Swift in their satirical view of their society and the conventions of their time. Certainly, the Art Guys rely a great deal on found objects to fabricate their art. Yet, they instill everything they touch with their own sensibilities. They do this with such a distinctive stylization, that even the commonest of objects - the telltale dust bunny under the couch, or a well-worn toothbrush - takes on a life and meaning all the Art Guys' own.