

# HAW/CONTEMPORARY

## **Artists employ felt, stoneware and junk mail in three shows at Haw Contemporary**

Neil Thrun, *Kansas City Star*, November 20, 2013

Haw Contemporary (successor to the Dolphin Gallery) has begun its second round of shows with three solo exhibitions from Miki Baird, Darcy Badiali and Marcie Miller Gross.

In her exhibit, "Working Parts," Gross is showing two of her signature stacked felt sculptures. "Orange (Split)" is made of two long, skinny, orange wedges of stacked felt that span an entire wall. A second installation, "Wedge (24)," uses a similar construction of 24 stacks of gray felt in boxy wedge shapes. Both works are elegantly designed and well-crafted, but their stark minimalist aesthetic is not very shocking or exciting.

Baird's display, "Read This," features works made from direct mail advertisements shredded into small strips. In the center of the room is "The Chronicles," a large, lumpy pile of shredded mail that stands about 4 feet high and spreads out over a much larger area. Collected from a single address (the artist's mother), the amount of paper is shocking to see all at once, yet it's an insignificant fraction of the entire world's junk mail.

Collages hang on the walls surrounding the pile. By reprinting copies of a particular advertisement, each collage repeats a word or phrase, such as "More," "Urgent" and "The value of." The shredded fragments are not glued flat but are instead stacked up and arranged in 3-D forms.

"Read This" uses many of the same techniques as mail advertising, namely volume and repetition, yet unlike advertisers, the exhibition bombards viewers with the entire volume at once.

Junk mail seems like a wasteful use of paper, but it must be a relatively successful way of doing business, otherwise why would businesses pay for it? And isn't that a common accusation against oversized artworks — that they're a waste of paint, metal, paper or whatever material they're made of? Yet volume and repetition must be useful tools for artists, otherwise why would they use them? In this sense, "Read This" isn't an environmental protest but a realization that volume and repetition are often required to convey a message.

Badiali's "Between the Lines" takes up the third and largest gallery of Haw Contemporary. Several enormous ceramic pots stand throughout the room. The works vary in texture, from slick and shiny to rough and dull with colors ranging from jet black, dull browns, cream and off-white.

"Fat Man," a vessel 54 inches tall and 23 inches wide, sits atop a 2-foot pedestal and towers over the viewer. Its rough surface is a cream color with varying amounts of shine and dullness, streaked with brown lines winding around its girth.

Named after the atomic bomb that was detonated over Nagasaki, "Fat Man" has a bomb-like shape and is joined by other atomic-themed works. "Little Boy," a spherical vessel named after the bomb that

destroyed Hiroshima, has a yellow-white color and an irregular spotty pattern reminiscent of radiation burns.

“Atomic Black” is a jet-black spherical pot streaked with areas of high shine and duller texture with thick black drips hanging from its underside.

Three large plates hang on the walls, each 43 inches in diameter. The cream colored “Insanity” is partially covered with green-brown splotches that suggest a mold stain. “Hell,” a cream and black plate, has an irregular surface with large swells forming in the clay like tumors. “Beyond Mind” features rough gestural circles gouged across its surface like claw marks.

Badiali’s exhibition has an appropriate name, as the theme of atomic war must be read “between the lines” through the works’ titles. This allows them to have an enigmatic visual impact, before the realization of the atomic context sets in. Yet for those who don’t take time to read the titles, it also leaves these symbolic bombs vulnerable to being “de-contextualized” or misunderstood as simply stoneware vessels. But maybe not — the visual cues of emotional despair and terror are strong.