

gallery reviews

THIS PAGE: Brennen Bechtol *Irisbrick* enjoys the great outdoors, 2004, mdf, plastic, enamel paint, 36 x 19 x 19". Photo by Cooper Brown.

RIGHT NEAR: Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Personal Uniforms*, 1991-present, 41 handmade dresses, installation view.
RIGHT FAR: Tom Burkhardt, *Full Stop* (detail), cardboard and paint.



ANYA TISH GALLERY

Toy Story

It's a major feat to curate an exhibition with fifteen international and Texas artists, but Anya Tish definitely pulls it off with great success. Artists included in the current exhibition, *Toy Story*, created works in various media: drawing, sculpture, video and installation, exploring multiple meanings of "play" and "toy." In keeping with the holiday spirit and the theme of the exhibition, opening night attendees can drop off new, unwrapped children's toys and games. These donations will be delivered to the non-profit *Boys and Girls Harbor*.

Many "toys" in the collection are active/interactive works that involve human intervention like pushing buttons, blowing, or using levers and gears. This interesting mix includes works by Brennen Bechtol, Harvey Bott, William Cannings, Daniel Fabian, Audry Herber, John Knott, Steve Kobb, Leszek Lewandowski, Elena Lopez-Poirot, Neva Mikulicz, Sharon Neyland, Anthony Thompson Shumate, Janet Tyson, Kyle Wadsworth and Oleg Yanushevsky.

If you have an affinity for toys that are primarily intended to construct objects, your favorites from this show are sure to be Brennen Bechtol, Janet Tyson and Harvey Bott. Native Floridian Brennen Bechtol earned a BFA in Drawing and Painting from the

University of North Texas in Denton, Texas in 1999. His work has been collected and exhibited throughout the state of Texas since 1995. Anya Tish's enthusiasm for Bechtol's talent is apparent as she describes a piece titled *Chula*, which means "cute" in Spanish. According to Tish, this three-dimensional work stands at approximately 3 1/2 feet tall and is a portrait of the artist's wife. This doll-like statue, handcrafted of wood and plastic, is standing on a Lego®-inspired platform wearing jeans, a pink t-shirt and sneakers with her hair in a ponytail. Everything is cute about this doll, including her lips and eyelashes.

Janet Tyson and Harvey Bott assemble structures that are less identifiable. Bott's metal structure, titled *Platform Offshore Erectus*, 1996-97, stands approximately 4 feet tall and is hinged so that it can swing back and forth. The metal strips that appear to be screwed together are silver, yellow, red, blue and orange. In contrast, Tyson's work is minute in scale. Tish describes these tiny vintage Lego® constructions as being like "little jewels." Each is constructed with the smallest of the Lego® pieces; some are blue, some are white, and others are clear. Tyson's use of the clear Lego® pieces is most intriguing.

Some of the artworks in the exhibition have mechanical or electronic features that allow interactivity. Three artists whose works explore technology are Leszek Lewandowski, Oleg Yanushevsky and Anthony Thompson Shumate. Lewandowski's work incorporates a little *trompe l'oeil*, or trick of the eye. These small-scale optical illusions mesmerize the viewer. The controversial nature of Oleg Yanushevsky's handmade 21st Century Russian Icons can be attributed, at least in part, to his incorporation of technology along with traditional materials such as gold leaf, wood and tempera. These icons have buttons on the body of the work that entice viewers to touch. When these buttons are pressed, the artwork sings songs, makes sounds of war, lights up, blinks, etc.. The expert craftsmanship of these icons includes actual computer chips that make it all work.

The most thought provoking work in the exhibition is by far the "quirky" piece created by young artist Anthony Thompson Shumate. The audio for the animation is actually sounds of nature he recorded in a park in Mexico City. This primarily wood sculpture at first glance resembles a rocket. Thompson Shumate states that "the body of the piece is actually a reproduction of a WW II torpedo with fins of the Fat Boy Bomb." He feels that with this sculpture he is tempting viewers to dialogue about the many layers to the work, though the work is not specifically intended to be anti-war or pro-war.

One could come away from the gallery feeling like they had just visited a toy store. Anya Tish Gallery, established in 1996, seeks out artists who have an unwavering commitment to creating original, compelling, and innovative art. Anya Tish states this relatively light-hearted exhibition has all kinds of toys, including political toys, but nothing of the adult toys variety.

— Nichole Pruitt

December 2 through January 3, 2006, 4411 Montrose Boulevard, 713.524.2299, www.anyatishgallery.com