

the Stranger

FREE EVERY THURSDAY
VOL. 19, NO. 19
JANUARY 14-20, 2010
WWW.SLEEPTALKINMAN.BLOGSPOT.COM



**SHABAZZ
PALACES**
THE BEST
SHOW OF 2010
ALREADY
HAPPENED
P. 32

THE BEDBUGS ARE COMING

BRENDAN KILEY ON SEATTLE'S MOST HORRIFYING NEW INHABITANTS P. 13

POT WHAT IS OLYMPIA SO
SCARED OF? P. 11

BOOKS WHAT IS GOOGLE DOING
TO US? P. 21

CHOW HAUTE DOGS & A HIGH-END
FOOD COURT PP. 25 & 26



VISUAL ART



COURTESY JAMES HARRIS GALLERY



COURTESY HOWARD HOUSE

BRINGING THE PEOPLE SOME COLOR Ron Nagle's 'Tetrogene' (2008, earthenware with overglazes, three inches tall), left, and Gretchen Bennett's 'Nirvana (Skid Row, Ted Ed Fred, Pen Cap Chew, Bliss)' (2010, mirror glass, chipboard, tape, 16 inches wide).

California, Seattle, and Las Vegas

Five Artists Who Will Take You Places

Amir Zaki, Ron Nagle

James Harris Gallery
Through Feb 20

It's the color you remember. Orange-pink light falling from the beach sun rising. Baby blue lifeguard tower in baby blue sky, like the tower's been dunked. Concrete gray (cracked), slate gray, white gray. Each photograph its own mnemonic device. This is Amir Zaki's series of images of locked Orange County lifeguard towers where he surfs in the mornings, paired with an ode to California. The ode is called *VW Vanagon Dawn Dusk, Dusk Dawn*. It's a large (4.5-by-8-foot) diptych of two Vanagons, positioned so they're facing off, in the same parking lot (the same oil stain appears in both photographs). Which view is dawn and which is dusk isn't quite clear—there's a morning moon—and the artist has fooled with the lines of the parking lot just a little, so that the two moments are forever joined in perspective, as if they were joined in time, too. The artist's subjects are time and space and color and form and myth, but what you get is an eyeful of saturated tangerine and royal blue and parked automobiles in cherry condition. Zaki is often called a conceptual photographer, whatever that means at this point; he's equally a sensualist and a formalist. You can feel his pictures—always created in series, slyly, as if he's just an archivist of categories of experience (backyard pools, modernist houses cantilevered off the edges of dry California hills, tree stumps at night, mailboxes that were made to look like houses, lifeguard towers)—imprinting physically, getting in there.

Which makes Zaki, a young artist, a startlingly good exhibition partner for San Francisco vet Ron Nagle, whose newest solid ceramic objects appear to have been rescued from another planet where everything is crusty but has exquisitely colored light inside it. (This also makes this show, at James Harris Gallery, the best possible thing to do on a Seattle winter day; it should be up this time every year.) Nagle is a master and a fixture: One of the generation of great California ceramicists of the 1960s, he's also a musician

who's written songs for Barbra Streisand and who did the special sound effects for *The Exorcist* (this great bit from Wikipedia: "Nagle and [bandmate Scott] Mathews broke into a Capitol Records sales meeting being held by the president of the company and disrupted the proceedings with midgets blasting fanfare trumpets and squealing pigs running loose through the legs of the executives"). For decades, he has been making cups with surfaces as obsessively cherry as a new Vanagon or a Robert Irwin disk. A few of those are here, informed as always by Nagle's low-high sensibility. One thin, delicate, peach-colored cup—you can only imagine liquid gold inside it—bears the image of little hands making a big black shadow crab. The mind lights up. JEN GRAVES

Yuki Nakamura, Gretchen Bennett

Howard House
Through Jan 30

In a restaurant, the front of the house is where plated dishes are served, cloth napkins are folded, and crumbs are scraped. The back of the house is the place for bacon grease, broken dishes, and expletives. Going by this model, the two shows at Howard House, *Illuminant* by Yuki Nakamura and *Community World Theater* by Gretchen Bennett, are perfectly staged.

Nakamura's porcelain lightbulbs are pristine examinations of form. Affixed to the wall perpendicularly, these sophisticated shapes are to be examined from all sides. When viewed straight on, *Diffuse Reflection* becomes almost scientific, the bulbs flattened and organized like cells in an observation dish. Some works try to extend beyond their capacities, striving for the theatrical. Animated coils scroll across *Filament Drawing. Illuminant (Pink)* incorporates a pink, widescreen light box. But the shining porcelain bulbs alone are the most satisfying: They stand flawlessly composed, awaiting visual consumption.

Walking into Bennett's *Community World Theater* relieves the saturation of Nakamura's white environment. The first lightbulb in sight, tinted by a magenta gel, resides inside

a stage lamp, the structure strewn across the floor. Beside it, clusters of mirrored glass scatter the bulb's reflection across the wall. Titled *Nirvana (Skid Row, Ted Ed Fred, Pen Cap Chew, Bliss)*, this installation is simultaneously an alternate band name, a regional reference, and a street where logs slide into Puget Sound, among other possibilities.

Throughout the back gallery, broken glass, soft pencil lines, and a low-resolution video create an environment of rawness. In Bennett's work, layers are their own medium. Similar to the experience of wandering through darkness, these works initially seem to be one thing

but, through time and awareness, focus into something else. *The Dull Flame of Desire* appears to be a series of drawn ghostly faces, but with better understanding reveals fading moments from a Björk music video of the same title. Singular works on paper demonstrate this process more plainly: *In the Pines, In the Pines* merges human, animal, and other subjects to the point of obscuring the images. The Prismacolor pencils Bennett uses are extremely bright, but somehow it still feels as though the image is clouded, presenting more content than the layers of pencil allow us to see. The works of *Community World Theater* are rich indulgences, but fortunately, this is the back of the house, where we can devour without shame. ERIN LANGNER

Marc Dombrosky: Neverland

Platform Gallery
Through Feb 20

So Marc Dombrosky hand-sews over the writing on notes he finds discarded—grocery lists, mini confessions, instructions, addresses, answers, fragments of love. So what? Plenty of artists sew text, and while none come immediately to mind who sew on found notes, I'm sure they do (plus, an aside: For some reason, far too many artists sew over cash-register receipts, and it must come to a

stop). And yet, despite the almost programmatic nature of what he does, Dombrosky's notes have always, somehow, been more than the sum of the program and the stitches. It's only now, in his first solo show at Platform Gallery, that the reason why starts to come into focus, and it's simple and applies to every artist of any kind worth loving: Dombrosky is such a sensitive translator of his world that it no longer seems his alone. The world we're in

This show is the best possible thing to do on a Seattle winter day; it should be up every year.

at this show is not only Dombrosky as a new, awkward transplant to Las Vegas—he moved there this summer from Tacoma, where he'd lived for several years, with his wife and fellow artist Shan-

non Eakins; he's teaching and she's studying at University of Nevada, Las Vegas—but also the world of Michael Jackson's death and Obama after the election. It's a place of hope and uncertainty; an emergence from the rain (of the Northwest, of the Bush era) into the desert, where it's sunny, but if you want to make something happen, you have to will it into existence. Aside from Dombrosky's gathering of carefully curated embroidered notes, two pieces branching into a sculptural direction stand out: a black Michael Jackson T-shirt on a hanger and a storage blanket on the floor, slumped against the wall. What was once the figure of MJ, printed in white on the shirt, is now covered in a heap of black embroidery—you can no longer make him out; he's deeper, but gone. What remain are tiny dots of white where Dombrosky couldn't quite cover all the white, leaving a twinkling night sky. Meanwhile, the dark blue blanket, disintegrating in parts from having been left out in the Las Vegas sun, has new panels sewn over the fragile remains of the original. Dombrosky made his own sea. JEN GRAVES ■

Info on every visual art event in Seattle at

theStranger.com/visart