



Raw, Sophisticated Exhibit Worth enView

By James Scarborough

Gazette Art Writer

Finishing school? Try finishing nails.

That's the irony of the artist collective "Finishing School's" display of Public Interaction Objects (PIOs) at enView Gallery.

The look of the show is raw — plywood, so it resembles a trip to Home Depot. Or else it's Tinker Toys meet Big Brother. Really, there's no there, there. Or so it seems.

Sophisticated and crafty — craftsmannish, too — the show consists of objects that elicit a response from the viewer. Political? Sure. Political in how, in public spaces, they engage the viewer first by innocuous though suspicious objects in unexpected places, second, by arousing curiosity and instilling trust.

"Here/there" situates wood placards in unlikely urban sites. "Write/send" allows you to send wood postcards to public officials whose addresses are presented in a binder. "Meet/greet" presents a camera mounted on a wheeled robot that documents viewer views.

"Plug/play" embeds a U.S.B. mini-drive in a piece of wood so it looks like a hand grenade. Innocuous-looking, allegedly neutral, the piece assumes you know these drives have replaced floppies and, for the most

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part, compact disks as a means to store digital data.

Once you know what it is — familiarity erases fear — curiosity compels you to wonder what's stored thereupon: The codes for nuclear holocaust? Child porn? Some father's chili recipe? There's no computer nearby to test your hypotheses, but don't you wish?

Except for its unfinished state, "take something/leave something #2" looks exactly like the book and coat rack you see as you enter a university bookstore. During gallery hours, the piece will be placed outside. It's initial installation will have it chock-a-block full of stuff: clothing, books, even money. People walk by, engage to some degree with it, take something, add something. It's a viral process of accretion; the viewers finish the work.

I like this show because it's taut and precise. It's edgy, it requires a lot from its viewers, both in terms of initially getting them to engage with the pieces, to spend those precious first few moments getting some manner of impression, and then interacting, in some way, with them.

It's got that "Is it art?" patina written all over it. It stretches our imagination, it makes us, if not uncomfortable, then a little perturbed: the points the pieces make are subtle. Just as you look at large Impressionist paintings long enough to have all the daubs of paint form into lines, shapes, and patterns, so too here do you ponder, give yourself up to the moment.

It's a show that challenges the viewer. It's not comfort food for the esthetic soul — vacations of color that, really, merge into one another.

This is more like chuck wagon grub — simple, essential, nutritious if not delicious.

Hours are 1-5 p.m. Saturday and by appointment. The show runs until March 25.

The gallery is located at 320 Elm Ave. For more information, call (213) 709-2691 or visit www.enviewgallery.com.

[\(top\)](#) or [\(entertainment page\)](#)