

Chris Doyle

TASHLAND DAILY
TIDINGS

Quills & Queues: ‘The Animated Image’ at the Schneider Museum of Art

By Jeffrey Gillespie / For the Tidings
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Image courtesy of Robinson Art Gallery, Denver A Stacey Steers installation.

Scott Malbaurn, the sartorially conspicuous and Pratt-educated potentate of the Schneider Museum of Art, has been delving recently into programming that might be considered “interesting” — in other words, academically astute and politically expedient exhibits that have seemed more designed to bring together members of the creative and philanthropic community Malbaurn might consider key to the evolution of the museum, an important component of the Oregon Center for the Arts, the larger institution of which Schneider is a part.

As such, schmooze seems to have at times taken precedent over substance. Not so with “The Animated Image,” a show of work by four artists — Matt Bollinger, Chris Doyle,

Rick Silva and Stacey Steers — that is curated by Malbaurn and Richard Herskowitz, the artistic and executive director of the Ashland Independent Film Festival (which is in full throttle from April 12-16 in Ashland).

“The Animated Image” (running at the Schneider Museum between April 12 and May 12) is an excellent and immersing show. Still somewhat heavy on the academics at the expense of creative heart — this may be an inevitability in a university setting — the work of the artists involved is sufficiently compelling to warrant a visit.

The show begins with Rick Silva, a Brazilian-born, Eugene-based artist, whose peculiar but engaging video art is accompanied by headsets filled primarily with white noise, in an apparent attempt to draw the viewer into a private world while keeping the narrative on the visual.

Chris Doyle, a Pennsylvania-born artist living and working in Brooklyn, brings elements of design to bear in his weird and thrilling 4k digital animation piece “Swell” (2017). Silhouettes of workers busying themselves in a Tetris-infested sphere — a kind of Orwellian candyland populated by Kara Walker-inspired hollow figures — signify the vexatious assiduity of the American lumpenproletariat.

The weakest link in the show is Matt Bollinger, a young RISD-educated artist whose work is technically proficient (and popular with museums, it seems) but lacks any real freshness; insipid stills in various excremental shades serve as unvaried auxiliaries for a central work of stop motion animation that might temporarily hold the attention of a lubricious farm animal in search of a high-tech trough, but holds little reward for human viewers.

This brings us to Stacey Steers, a Boulder, Colorado, based installation artist whose work is by far the most interesting in the show. Intensely detailed and labor-intensive, Steers’s work glows with fascinating detail. Gothic dollhouses of astounding complexity are filled with video vignettes of silent film stars from the 1920s and strange, absorbing minutiae. In one, an egg is tied ornately to a living room chair in a wacky homage to René Magritte. A stack of kohlr-black beds reach to the sky, an Edward Gorey-esque phantasm, evoking some unspoken horror. Elsewhere, a signature piece from Steers’s “Edge of Alchemy” installation entitled “Trilogy Oculus” — a visual feast that includes wood, screens, antique brass and mixed media components — plays tricks with reflection and projection in an ornate presentation that cohabits elegantly with more traditional materials. Antiquarian in affect, the work is nonetheless right on trend and exhilarating.

In all, this visual feast is a worthy collaboration between two deeply-rooted Ashland institutions. It’s good to see, and we hope this kind of creative cross-pollination continues.