

Longing to Touch at Inman Gallery

By Hank Hancock, Tues. Jan. 18, 2011



Katrina Moorhead, *Landscape of a Danger*

Somehow the most conspicuous visitors at the opening of two solo shows at Inman Gallery last Saturday were a group of five toddlers who had their own thoughts about the works on exhibit. In particular, they were transfixed by Carl Suddath's untitled sculptural work of mahogany beams joined together into an off-kilter framework both graceful and dynamic. Each two-year-old released from her parents' clutches raced instantly toward the centerpiece of Suddath's show, called "60' 6'," and had to be chased after. Considering that Suddath's own daughter was one of the tykes in question, and they say children make the harshest critics, maybe Suddath's wood-frame sculpture was intentionally pitched to appeal to a spirit of play. Certainly his other works spoke more to the adults, most soberly of them a series in which whole sheets of paper have been tinted by watercolor, graphite, or dye, then mounted and hung. A few minutes with these works will draw attention to the frayed edges and watermarking of the thick paper, to its manufacture, as well as to subtle variances in the field of color. Mounted behind glass and obscurely reflective, these pieces throw our gaze back into the gallery and defy an ordinary ability to focus on them as objects.

Also at Inman Gallery, Katrina Moorhead's "Landscape of a Danger" provided a lot for rug rats and aficionados alike. Moorhead's central installation comprised low, octagonal wooden frames with raised sheetrock platforms, which were decorated with a richly colored mixture of animal skins, chalk lines (those polyester strings a carpenter might use to snap-draw a straight line), eggs, seashells, and jingle bells. Visitors looked at varying angles and proximities, reminding themselves and their kids not to climb on it and touch it, despite the welcoming sensibility in its construction and materials. Honestly, it was just slightly vexing not to be able to run one's fingers through the little pile of jingle bells that had been arranged on a swatch of cerulean-dyed fur. The delicate seashells and eggs, arranged thoughtfully around this room-size work, are like the natural treasures you'd find hidden in plain sight at the beach or in the woods. This combination of natural and manufactured materials, and the eye-popping blue and silver colors, invites the viewer to consider what the artist calls "the double-edged sword" of exploration and development. Our built environment allows us access to and comfort within the natural world, but we must acknowledge the consequences of our intrusion.