

The recent exhibition, conscious inaction, at Meat Market, might have all the problems one would want or expect strong undergraduate students to have: high polish, remarkable craft, forced irony, and maybe a touch too much effort to be banal. These are not bad things to have and can likely be expected of the conscientious art student that has one eye looking back at the 20th Century in a history book while the other eye gropes at the 21st Century through glossy magazines.

Benjamin Jurgensen's sculptures of discarded junk and ordinary objects are gathered in groups and evenly spaced throughout the front half of the gallery. In the corner is a car door with fire extinguishers and a forest of air-fresheners. Next to it is the frame of a large tricycle on bricks and cinderblocks. Painted many times over in latex paint, with a reduced palette of 6 colors, the work appears to be made of plastic. The general idea is for the juxtaposition of elements to force new narratives. But, those narratives are no more interesting than the rubbish thrown out to the curb by the average urban dweller. It is not to say the sculptures are not fun. There is something compelling about the diligence and craft of an individual willing to carve a folding chair and stanchion out of medium density fiberboard and wood.

In the back gallery are the photographs of Paul Jeffreys exploring the predatory identity of masculinity in two environments. One environment documents the directly conquered taxidermy displays of heads and carcasses within a hunting trophy room. The other, an empty strip club, explores the environment of pseudo-sexual domination. Both traipse through the fantasy of machismo. Hunting excursions via game farming and hunting pens are on the incline. And just how elevated can the male libido get when his sexual prey is dancing on a stage fit for the price of admission? The game he can kill but not eat; the dame he can view but not touch. Greed and insecurity gets the better of guys in both instances, and the end result is the sum of shortcomings rather than the actualization of being a man. The images are enough to roll your eyes over, and what a mockery we might make of a sex that can't hit the inside of a urinal in a public bathroom.

With this exhibition, what is of greater interest is potential. What are these two capable of creating a couple years outside of the womb of the Corcoran, having kicked loose the opiates of academia? With conscious inaction the two artists are true to the title. But every, conscious inaction has an unconscious reaction.

conscious inaction is on display at Meat Market, 1636 17th Street NW, through September 30.
Opening Reception: Friday, September 7, 6:00-8:30 p.m
POSTED BY JOHNJAMESANDERSON AT 9:58 PM