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Arts Review

By Rachel Koper

'Annette Lawrence: Free Paper'

Flatbed Gallery

Through Feb. 6

It's worth dashing over to Flatbed Gallery to see "Free Paper," the Annette Lawrence solo show presented by Austin Green Art and ForestEthics. In it, this accomplished and nuanced artist addresses a bunch of neat things simultaneously with simple materials, including the passage of time, calendars, edge quality, abstract sculpture, personal environmental impact, collecting, and storing.

The installation is made of hand-torn paper strips that are stacked on shelves. Each 2-inch-wide stack consists of unsolicited junk mail balanced in piles of various sizes. Lawrence presents one pile for each month of the year. One (secret) rule of abstraction is that multiples of anything start to look cool – a rhythm appears and gives it strength. While these chronological archives are made of colorful advertisements, the end color reads as a gray mass. By collecting and combining these disparate pieces, Lawrence has transformed them into a unified and believable new vision of fuzzy towers. The whole group in a line reads to me like the Zapotec ruins of Monte Albán or some ancient ziggurat made with powerful geometry. The systematic 2-inch stacks are so regular and repetitive that the little droopy parts at the ends give them force and an odd tension. The curvature of the Earth on a wide horizon is vaguely implied by the longer ends of paper when they sag at the outskirts of the stack. It's natural to see landscapes in all horizontal shapes.

Many artists, as builders, possess a unique sensitivity to their personal environmental impacts as consumers. Recently I recognized the perilous territory that these green artists enter as well as their bravery. For example, one collects small raw materials with a vision of creating a valuable bigger new thing. This is the beginning. One artist I've met collected bottle caps for a few months but stopped because he realized that his collection could show publicly how much beer he drank. Faith Gay recently talked about "feeling crazy" because she collects bits of things (for additive sculptures) in her pockets, even as she moves through her home. The list of fine artists who are physically addressing environmental issues in their work is growing rapidly. Put Lawrence on the list of prescient locals such as Gay, Virginia Fleck, and Peat Duggins.

Lawrence also made a charming series of corrugated storage boxes for display, each one a negative shape carefully taped into a customized rectangle. These are crafty humorous brown silhouettes of groovy

mesalike inner shapes. Precious cartons and expensive crates do help your status in the art world (secret). This is good-looking art with heavy recycling mojo, but the primacy of the craftsmanship is what's paramount. Thanks to Randy Jewart of Austin Green Art for bringing Lawrence's show here. If you like this art show, Google Chris Jordan's photos after you've signed the petition at www.donotmail.org.

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