

ART REVIEW

Provocative Peetz shares 'Lessons Learned' at Axis

BY JULIA COUZENS
Special to The Bee

Friendship between artists can be a passionate mix of mutual support, creative collaborations, competitive goads, professional envy and deep understanding. Deep and abiding friendships are precious. Ron Peetz dedicates his solo show at Axis Gallery to his lifelong mentor and friend, Phil Weidman, a noted Sacramento poet. "Phil Weidman taught me that there might be art made from chewing gum and barber shop sweepings."

Taking that lesson to heart, Peetz composes his provocative, idea-based show from such pedestrian objects as wooden stools, \$1 bills, television rabbit ears, rubber inner tubes and baseball bats. At his best, Peetz is comparable to the renegade surrealist Meret Oppenheim, famous for her fur-lined teacup.

In the 48 years that Peetz has been exhibiting, he has consistently made conceptually based work peppered with text, absurdist humor and elegant, if unexpected, material links. Weidman plus Bill Allan, Bruce Nauman and Steve Kaltenbach were players in the early days of Funk and S.F. Bay Area

Lessons Learned – Ron Peetz

When: Artist talk at 1 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 18; exhibit continues noon-5 p.m. Friday-Sunday and by appointment through Feb. 26.

Where: Axis Gallery. 625 S St., Sacramento

Cost: Free

Information:
axisgallery.org

dada. They were Peetz's first influences, and their conceptual tenets have remained an abiding component of his work. Peetz first showed in 1969 in the third, and last, version of the Slant Step at the Art Place gallery in Sacramento. His entry, "Hairy Slant Step," was made in collaboration with Weidman and is documented in Thomas Albright's historically significant text, "Art in the San Francisco Bay Area: 1945-1980." Most artists, especially regional artists, never get close to what becomes historically momentous events in art history. Peetz has.

The band has long stopped playing for the Funk art movement, for Bay Area "Dude Ranch

Dada," and for inbred conceptual art composed of mundane artifacts buttressed by reams of critical text. They have been in the art world bloodstream for decades. While Peetz continues to produce works with these attitudes in mind, the issue is whether his work continues to trigger questions, posit doubts or poke holes in one's sensory ecosystem. The answer is "yes." An example is "Nightlight for R. Mutt," (2017), Peetz's ode to Marcel Duchamp's infamous "Fountain," (1917), a porcelain urinal which Duchamp signed R. Mutt. "Fountain" landed a conceptual punch that knocked the early 20th-



"Soliloquy" by Ron Peetz
Courtesy Axis Gallery



Courtesy Axis Gallery

"Everything Is Broken," a sculpture by Ron Peetz, is part of the Axis Gallery exhibit.

century art world on its heels. Peetz's sculptural homage is a gestural loop of powder blue neon, suggesting a limp penis, which sprouts from the seat of a vintage kitchen stool. It is both polished and amusing, commenting as it does on the current virility of Duchamp's anti-art intention.

"Witness" (2017) is a plank of lumberyard pine studded with knots, one of which has been hollowed out and filled with a glass eye. At first glance, the piece feels disturbingly and inexplicably off. With great subtlety the embedded eye makes its presence known, and when it does, the board is transformed into a living, watchful entity. In different hands, "Witness" could have been a sort of cornball tourist handcraft about druids and spirits in the woods. However, Peetz's craftsmanship, minimal simplicity and concern for the perfect configuration of knots imbue the work with cunning intelligence and wit. It is an unsettling work of poetry and restraint.

Peetz is at his best conveying ideas through sculpture, sensitively

crafted primarily from wood, glass and stone. Less successful are "Field of Play" and "Strikes" (both 2017), two works in which a significant component is painting. Peetz installs baseball bats into which large thick brushes have been set next to a red Rothko-esque painting and a painting composed of loosely painted gestural lines. The presumptive trope is that he is "taking a swing" at mid-20th-century iconic painting. Peetz does not have the sense of touch for painting that he most definitely

does for his other materials. His paintings become pictures of paintings, superficial treatments of what so deeply engage dedicated painters and as such perform as shticky one-liners.

While this show is uneven, the work is serious and worthy. No less important is Peetz's generosity to other artists. His capacity for friendship is a component of his significant and lasting contribution to the art of this region. He is in danger of becoming a Sacramento treasure.