

ART OF RENEWAL

JAMES KELLY CONTEMPORARY
550 SOUTH GUADALUPE STREET, SANTA FE

ART OF RENEWAL'S CURRENT

group show (through February) at James Kelly Contemporary is a selection by director James Kelly of works from several of the gallery's artists. Perhaps the recent holidays have something to do with the quiet, low-key appeal of the show. Its ensemble cast of distinct artists, all gathered under one roof, invites the seasonal theme of all the kids come home for the holidays. Their assembly reveals an underlying family resemblance shared in common. This affinity might speak to Kelly's own aesthetic or, at the least, to some aspect central to his collection strategy. Whatever the source, *Art of Renewal's* display of manifold devices and desires occurs within a tacit harmony of effect.

And what is that tacit harmony? Not a clue. And if I knew I wouldn't tell. *Art of Renewal* makes no concession to any viewer expectations of being told what they're looking at, much less how it should affect them. You're on your own in there. And being on your own, you take in each piece on its own terms and then respond to it on yours.

Left to yourself, you start to find—or make—connections. One link seems to be the artists' shared belief in the capacity of "historical" art styles to reinvent themselves. The figuration and handling of Jack Balas's easel-range oils on canvas are reminiscent of the work of David Salle or Eric Fischl during the Neo-Expressionist return of painting to the interecine terrain of the Postmodern 1980s. Yet the eclectic tact of Balas eschews the Postmodern polemic to pursue an authentic painterly style and highly personal narrative. Bill Jacobson's pigment prints deploy the documentary bent of Postmodern photography in his *Place* series, in which the concept of place is grasped as installation space (#125), actual space (#425), and state of mind (#554). The irony at work in David Taylor's archival inkjet prints affirms the medium's objectivity while rejecting its Postmodern detachment. *Border Monument No. 198* features an obelisk atop a rocky outcrop surveying a vast lunar landscape of silent desert—a mute memorial to oblivion. In *The New River (with border fence)*, Calexico, a full moon in the deep blue night sky is usurped by the glare of the lights high above the chain link fence of the border station that keeps vigilant watch against a menacing flood of migrant labor. The abstract skeins of Wes Mills' graphite-and-pigment arabesques and of Matt Magee's oil-on-litho grids evoke the harmonic dissonance of some avant-garde concerto.

So does the fantasia on Euclidean solids in Pard Morrison's enamel-on-acrylic *Mutation* series, scored with intense primary colors.

The most subtle formal device at work in the show's serendipity—likely intuitive, at times unintended—is arguably the most effective: a reciprocal scheme that rises to the level of visual trope's ornament without detracting from any work's structure. I refer to a pervasive bisymmetry achieved through recourse to reverse, converse or complementary forms or formal handling, especially in the mirror-image compositions.

Bruce Nauman's *Partial Truth* series is represented by two prints. In one, an etching, the dark Roman-type letters of the "Partial Truth" title are hatched against a white ground; in the other, the title letters are rendered as white embossed letters raised in low relief above the paper's surface. Susan York's diptych *Daily Practice: Day 26, Drawing and Sphere* pairs a solid graphite drawing of a six-and-a-half-inch diameter sphere with an "actual" six-and-a-half-inch sphere made of solid graphite and set on a painted wood shelf. Nic Nicosia's *Untitled Figure #8* is a white paper clay figure with arms akimbo. This sculpture is flanked by *so thinking busy*, an archival inkjet print on paper depicting the same sculpture. And in the print the lighting has thrown into shadow all the interior areas of the figure and its vertically stacked multiple heads while highlighting the outer contours of the form—the mirror-image of *Untitled Figure*, where the interior forms of the clay sculpture are highlighted while the contours of its body and heads are in shadow. In Jacobson's *Place* series, with its vertical board/slab/rectangle as the underlying grid motif, the black stele of #425 linking the horizontally stacked bands of sky, distant shore, water, and coastal zone reverts to the grey-white rectangle of #554 locking together all the geometric elements of the grid composition. And bilateral contrast is attained within a single work in James Drake's charcoal-on-paper *Black Bird/White Mirror*.

The trait that is common to all the artists selected for the show is their command of an inherent structure and narrative potential that both enable and sustain a viewer's vicarious experience of their works. Perhaps that's the essence of the art of renewal.

—RICHARD TOBIN



Nic Nicosia, *Untitled Figure #8*, paper clay,
18" x 11" x 2½", 2011