



ARTS+ENTERTAINMENT ~ ARTS

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Rust and reflection

by Julianna Thibodeaux

"Rhet Licklitter
 Galerie Penumbra
 Through Sept. 29

If it's possible to live inside anyone else's head, the most likely portal is through their imagination. Rhet Licklitter, whose exhibition of recent works opened last weekend at Galerie Penumbra, makes use of collage — a sort of layering rather than a compiling of things. A single object is rendered sacred or a slip of rusted wire is re-imagined as a fence. Boundaries, then, are Licklitter's currency, the line between what we see and what we perceive, between the real and the fancied.

Licklitter brought his European impressions back to Indiana and sifted them into his present work, representing a dramatic leap forward since the last time he showed his work here. Europe must have been good to him as a place where his aesthetic dreams could mature. These works of art represent a thoughtfulness that comes from studied introspection and careful tinkering.

In the large painting "Ich Gemacht Drei Kreuzen (Exit)," the letter X moves across the canvas like a large neon sign, although that's the only suggestion of modernity. Licklitter employs oil, acrylic and paper to achieve a textured thickness to the painting's surface — like waxed paper rolled over the plain of a parking lot. Yet these raised surfaces are not accidental: They emerge as lyrical loops, whorls and dots. Each X comes into being over a panel of green, yellow and then red, basking in the glow of primary colors made to feel ancient.

Equally spare and yet deeply realized, "Tin Can for Tapiés" pays homage to Spanish abstract expressionist painter Antoni Tapiés, whose works also possesses a stark yet complex aesthetic. Licklitter's tin can assumes the status of sacred object: Crushed and affixed to the canvas it becomes two-dimensional, its lid propped up in a sort of salute — dwarfed by the increased span of the flattened can. The can's rust tone is picked up in German text that includes a phone number — an appropriation that likely has more than one meaning. The same textured surface is at play beneath the can, although here it is more primitive.

The conceptual "Woman Reading" employs two panels, one of which includes burlap pressed on to the canvas with a page from the International Herald Tribune. Headlines from 2006 read "Turmoil in Thailand" and "Inequality for Gypsies," which could also be construed as metaphorical accidents. The accompanying panel is affixed with two looped, rusted metal rods, an abstraction of a pelvis or fallopian tubes — or perhaps both.

Despite the interpretive possibilities, these paintings don't feel troubled — rather, they are unusual and enigmatic, confidently relaxed, as if the artist were reclined on a couch viewing a faded photo album of distant travels and cherished moments with a lover, or a map with tattered edges, burnished into the autumn of memory.

Recent paintings by Rhet Licklitter are on view through Sept. 29 at Galerie Penumbra, 1043 Virginia Ave., in Fountain Square. Call 317-508-8043 or visit www.galeriepenumbra.com for hours and information.

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