

CisternYard Media – Thirty years of art

At first glance, both Jody Zellen and Bob Trotman couldn't seem like more different artists. Zellen's exhibit features fast changing screens, graphic design, and sketches while Trotman's is filled with wooden figurines and every day office décor. Perhaps this is the greatest part of the Halsey's newest exhibits—their unpredictable cohesiveness. Halsey's feature artists blend the basics and the modern in one beautifully coherent statement about the human condition—what it means to be alive today.



*Jody Zellen's art on exhibit.
(Photo courtesy of the Halsey Institute)*

Virtual and technological artwork overwhelmingly dominates the walls of Zellen's room in Halsey. Her exhibit reflects today's fast pace digital world with all its juxtapositions and randomness. The pieces express the multidimensional nature of today's society perfectly by mixing different art forms. Her decision to include news images and to program her digital pieces to update constantly is a very conscious commentary and exploration of a technological and interrelated society. The smaller room within the Halsey was built specifically for Zellen's interactive artwork, providing a sort of out of body experience. As the viewers become a part of the lifelike artwork, they become conscious of their surroundings; actors rather than receivers. These pieces are unsettling and eerie because of their familiarity. The noises, animations, and real life images in such a closed environment force the viewers to respond to what they are watching and experiencing—life.

Another aspect of her exhibit is the art apps that she created. Driven by modern wireless world, her art has not only adapted to technology, it is technology. Realistic in conception, nature, and realization, Zellen described her digital art as "looking at the screen as a sculpture and more than just a didactic space for information." Zellen's art has a feeling of life infused into it—it's modern, it's relevant, it's relatable.



One of Bob Trotman's wooden figurines from his exhibit "Business as Usual." (Photo courtesy of the Halsey Institute)

Walking into Bob Trotman's exhibit after Zellen's is like stepping into a still life—frozen and a little unsettling. He draws on Samuel Beckett's idea of a "corporate purgatory", examining the destructive and inhumane effects of capitalism. Wooden figures of business men are the center piece of his show; the entire exhibit feels like walking into an office on Wall Street if time was standing still. His life size figures emphasize the generic and manufactured nature of today's society. The choice to use wood in the pieces represents both the simplicity of his message and wood's historical use in cults, according to the artist. Though all the figures are positioned and shaped differently, their facial expressions remain very similar. All have wide eyes and open mouths that resemble an expression that a person would make after a life changing discovery—and not the good kind. Collectively the figures evoke different situations like an attempted escape or veneration, but all project an idea of discomfort and emptiness. Trotman describes his "Business as Usual" exhibit as "a view of the powerful without their power; it's the emperor without his pants."

For its 30th anniversary the Halsey really made sure its two featured artists were top notch. Whether it was through Marxist philosophy or modern technology, inspiration was not lacking for Trotman and Zellen who both beautifully translated certain realities that they—as artists—are particularly attuned to. The artists' mix of old and new, simple and complex, negative and positive have given this winter's exhibit a wholesome feel. The pieces represent different aspects of humanity and society that together represent today's reality.