

Reinaldo Valentin, Easton Irregular art Profile, Oct, 2012

“art, people, places, change”

I first encountered Reinaldo Valentin’s art while reviewing Josh Finck’s work in *_Technifying* at Soft Machine Gallery in Allentown. I noticed that he and Josh share more than a passion for antiquated technology. Yes, both feature salvaged objects and machines; but more importantly, they personify a work ethic that I associate with Pennsylvania. They are engineers, inventors, “tinkers” who seem compelled to take things apart to see how they work. They remind me of my grandfather--hard working, curious, knowledgeable of practical things--who worked in a steel mill all week, yet built furniture and odd toys on the weekends. Reinaldo and Josh go one step further, they assemble the components with the intention of making contemporary art.

Reinaldo collects old clocks and music boxes, lenses from magnifying glasses and slide projectors and cameras, and makes them into sculptures, each artwork is an homage to a particular person, pet, or fictional character. In one piece, a photo of a beagle that had to be put down is fitted into a music box that still plays. The song, combined with a ticking clock and a curved glass lens distances me from the subject, reminding me that time has passed but this moment is frozen. I peer into the lens and see a blurry figure held separate, protected and preserved, the effect is heightened by bright highlights suspended in the glass and the solidity of the sculpture. Reinaldo experiments with long, double, and pinhole camera exposures as well as images from film. His dad was a photographer, but glass, with its special material qualities, holds sway over Reinaldo’s imagination.

Mostly self-taught, Reinaldo has shown extensively in the area. To list but a few: in 2012, he exhibited at New Vox Gallery and at Soft Machine. In 2011, he showed at the Antonio Salemme Foundation in the Chen Art Group Show *Walking the Edge*, and also that same year, he had a solo exhibit *Reflections in the Storm* at New Visions Studio and Gallery in Scranton. In 2010, he was in *Changing Seasons*, a two-person exhibit at the Touchtone Theater in Bethlehem, and in 2009, he showed in *Art for Change* at Mercantile Home here in Easton.

Reinaldo owns and operates New Vox Gallery in the Palace Row section of Bethlehem, and he believes that art will revitalize the neighborhood. New Vox shares space with Kalat Carpet Gallery, a practical way to keep rent costs affordable. Reinaldo’s mantra is “art, people, places, change.” The front of the gallery mixes private and public art, where members maintain a presence alongside street and installation art; the back of the gallery offers one-and-two-person shows, 6 times a year. When I visited, Jeremy Siedt’s unnerving and beautiful corrosive metal paintings were on display. Jeremy builds the work from back to front, laying metal wire and various metal scraps behind canvas and dousing the front of the canvas with chemical solutions, producing pieces that change as the chemical processes unfold over time. The power and unsettling quality of his work comes from knowing that it is not archival, that the canvas will rot unless the chemistry is altered. Jeremy’s work may reference the Steel Stacks, our monument to the local work ethic.

The next show at New Vox, *White on Repeat*, features Jayne Struble and Liz Wheeler, two artists who have for the moment, limited themselves to working in white. Struble fuses topographical map-style lines into patterns that play with our perception of space, and Wheeler makes unglazed, humorous sculptures that recreate a memory in three-dimensional space. The show opens April 7 (reception 6:30-10pm) and closes May 5.

—Elizabeth Johnson