

Houston Press

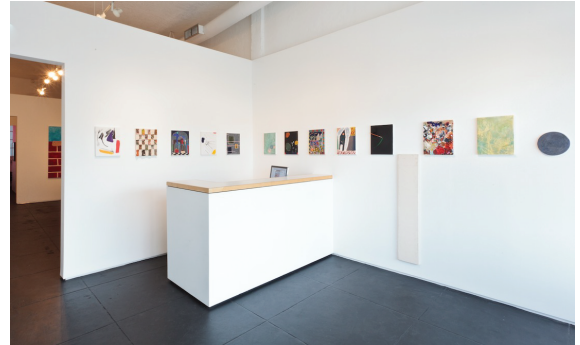
January 23, 2013

Exploring 'Common Objects' at David Shelton Gallery

By Meredith Deliso

Organizing an art show around everyday objects seems like a liability. By focusing on the mundane, you run the risk of the artwork itself being mundane, too. Luckily, David Shelton's latest show, "Common Objects," narrowly avoids this fate thanks to the strength of its three artists.

Curator Shane Tolbert brings Ted Gahl, Nathan Hayden and Lane Hagood together for the exhibition. They each have very different styles and sensibilities, but, for purposes of the show, they are united by their exploration of the "idiosyncrasies of daily experience."



Ted Gahl, Installation view at David Shelton Gallery

Connecticut artist Ted Gahl's work is about painting itself. His small-scale paintings line the front room of the gallery, stretching above the gallery desk in a varied conversation about paint and process that feels like the painting equivalent of multiple personality disorder. How else do you explain a piece like the ambiguously named *Content*, comprised of beautiful, sparse strokes of paint, in the same "sentence" as *Caught Painting*, a visual play on words consisting of a paint brush trapped mid-stroke by a mouse trap, which is immediately followed by an uncharacteristically long stretch of raw canvas titled *Pause (Comma Painting)* -- a literal interruption in the flow of paintings. They're playful works that refreshingly don't take themselves too seriously, but I do wish they weren't blocked by the gallery's front desk, preventing any serious study of most of them.

We leave behind the bright color of the front gallery for Southern California artist Nathan Hayden's unkindofremarkable, an installation three years in the making consisting of black-and-white ink drawings on paper that stretch across one wall. The paper is comically small for the impressive amount of detail and text that comprise both the front and back. It looks as if Hayden's journal has burst neatly apart, his stream-of-conscious text and scribbles exposed and available for the plucking.

Childlike images of feet and hands -- the bane of artists everywhere -- dominate the rest of the show. They're done by Hunting Prize-winning Houston artist Lane Hagood in his trademark primitive style. It's a style that makes it seem as if the artist isn't trying all that hard. (He is, of course, the man behind what was once called the ugliest food truck in Houston). But the more time you spend with them, the more you notice the details -- the blue veins in the hands and feet, the thorny hair on the legs -- and the thoughtful composition of his paintings. He even plays a bit with his style, accurately depicting one of the most famous -- and expensive -- paintings in the world -- Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. He replicates the painting on a coffee cup in what I can only guess is a silly homage to the artist, a master at depicting emotion. Whether repulsed, intrigued or amused, these unconventional works make you feel something, too.

"Common Objects" at David Shelton Gallery, 3909 Main Street, runs through February 16. For more information, call 832-538-0924 or visit davidsheltongallery.com.