

High, galleries blossom in 2005

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 12/25/2005

Atlanta is a city permanently on the verge. Thirty years ago, we were "the next great international city." Today, as the Brand Atlanta slogan has it, "Every day is an opening day."

Reaching maturity is an incremental and complex process. In a healthy visual arts community, all four cylinders — artists, collectors and other supporters, commercial galleries, and nonprofit institutions — pump along together. Yet single events can sometimes accelerate the process.

(article abridged)

Finally, some exhibits that resonated in the memory at year's end:

- "The Art of Romare Bearden," High Museum of Art. This thorough retrospective was a great opportunity to follow the trajectory of Bearden's career, to understand his motivations and, best of all, to revel in his creative genius.
- "Richard Sudden: The Wreathmaker," White Space; "Cecilia Kane: Hand to Hand," the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center (through Jan. 7); "Joe Peragine: Hell on Wheels," Solomon Projects.

We've all been bombarded to the point of numbness with images of the carnage in Iraq. These exhibits by Atlanta artists took the side road to make an impact.

For his installation and performance, Sudden set up a work table and made ghostly white plaster wreaths, each corresponding to war deaths marked on a calendar mounted on the wall. The wreaths piled up in mournful profusion as he continued this solemn rite, but he couldn't keep pace with the casualties.

Kane drew a war-related image about each day of the conflict on a stuffed white glove and hung them in rows in the circular gallery. Clowns in bright colors stand in for soldiers, but no one is fooled.

In his exploration of war and its relationship to masculinity, Peragine made a sculpture of a Sherman tank out of duffle bags that puffed up and deflated, becoming a droopy war machine in need of a dose of Viagra. For his darkly satirical animated video on the Iraq war, he revived the strategy employed in his video about Sept. 11, 2001, using bunnies in place of humans.

- It was a good year for women and ceramics: Pandra Williams' fantastic flora at Swan Coach House Gallery, Annette Gates' delicate organisms at Swan and Kiang Gallery, and Diane Kempler's poetic evocations of Myanmar at Emory University's new Visual Art Gallery were among the year's highlights.