

# JAMES HARRIS GALLERY

309A THIRD AVENUE SOUTH, SEATTLE, WA 98104  
tel: 206.903.6220 fax: 206.903-6226 www.jamesharrisgallery.com

## PRESS RELEASE

**“Message in a bottle”  
Feb 14 – March 15, 2008  
Reception: Thursday, Feb. 14 6-8 PM**

James Harris Gallery is pleased to announce a group exhibition titled *Message in a Bottle*. In bringing together a wide range of mediums – including sculpture, photography, painting and installation – the show focuses on how artists transform the expected visual utility of an object to multiple pictorial possibilities. These are artists who inherently investigate the origins of their subjects, creating fictive spaces and new relationships by placing disparate or unusual objects together in dynamic ways. Helga Steppan, for instance, works by setting up clearly defined parameters and then documenting the process and results. In her series ‘See Through,’ Steppan divided all of her belongings into the full spectrum of different color groupings. These groupings were then arranged according to classical compositional values and photographed. The images that result are magnetic monochrome photographs that both reflect the artist’s persona and deny our understanding of it.

Similarly Francisco Guerrero culls from the unlimited piles of imagery in popular culture. Using it only as source material, Guerrero then washes over these images with a seductive, masterly hand. At the same time, he emphasizes the anonymity of his subjects. Through the tension between a highly painterly and personal style and the exceedingly editorialized airbrushed content, Guerrero calls into question the way we, almost literally, consume images as reality.

Andrew Witkin collects, creates, and organizes a variety of elements to present multiple connections between the aural, visual and textual parts. In *Sculpture #2*, a table-top installation, the artist has placed records, books, newspaper article, photographs around empty wine bottles and wine glasses on a long table. The placement of each object is key to transforming the context of its origin into an open ended narrative that tells a story about the way the artist navigates the world.

Stephanie Syjuco takes objects that look strangely familiar and manipulates them to new ends, so as to mutate icons and imagery towards a different service. For example the photograph titled *Pacific Super* addresses issues of global production, consumption and cross-cultural translation, using the familiar image of a world-famous “mystical” European landmark “Stonehenge” and everyday Asian goods.

Eric Elliott uses subtle variations of grey oil paint to show the viewer that all things are interconnected, that everything is part of a larger whole. His non-tradition still life paintings hover between abstraction and realism. The heavy impasto surface created by his brush work reveals objects while pushing them into pictorial abstraction.

In contrast to Elliott’s dense applications of paint Joseph Park’s compositions are impeccably mannered. Without blending a single color directly on the canvas, Park’s cool realism is able to evoke multiple references. From anime to pre-Raphaelite painting

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Photography is available upon request.

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and cubist sensibilities, Park explores and implodes the history of vanitas. He infuses traditional techniques with an almost unprecedented cinematic and pictorial realism so that while the compositions appear to be simple and echo snapshots they are complex narratives of the private moments.

Though Roy McMakin's sculptures resemble useful/functional objects, he pushes them past their own utility. In the exhibition, for instance, the 2-dimensional picture plane of a painting breaks into a sculptural object. This layful give and take acts a vehicle for the artist to investigate formal concepts while distancing them from functionalism. McMakin disrupts our notion of the domestic realm by referencing a vernacular decorative motif commonly found in mass produced cabinetry, defining and challenging the relationship between art-making a design.

Through freedom of reference and quotation, as well as a rejection of conventional hierarchies among sources, Adam Pendleton similarly aims to upset comfortably subjective interpretations of history and culture. Pendleton's ten-inch, ceramic black cubes for instance invoke minimalist practices but the rounded sides and corners deliberately shirk off linearity and geometric definition. The highly glazed objects hover between 1970s decoration and contemporary sculpture.

Like the diverse range of art in the show, each of these artists comes to their practice from very different backgrounds, which means that their approaches to what can be termed "contemporary still life" are as varied. Some have roots in traditional painting others work conceptually with language and image. Either way, what unites these artists is that each incorporates both a public and private vocabulary in their practice and, in so doing, a message resounds: In the hand of the artist, no icon is just destined to one meaning; images perpetually shift and signify as their audiences change.

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