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## Bio-photography and artifice

Friday, March 31, 2006

**BRIAN LIBBY**

In a month full of ceramics, three photography exhibits stood out -- but hurry, you only have a few days -- in one case, hours -- to catch them.

Daniel Barron's photographs at Pushdot Studio collectively feel like a caustic futuristic vision that film directors Stanley Kubrick or Terry Gilliam might conceive. But Barron's vision is an abstract one. Titled "In the Knee of the Curve," the nine large-format photographs (varying from 2 to 5 feet long, and mounted on Plexiglas) find Barron exploring the intersection of science and biology with disorienting close-in views. Barron evokes a future in which, as his artist statement reads, ". . . we stand poised to gain direct control of our own evolution."

The surfaces look familiar: human skin, liquid, individual hairs, and what appears in one shot to be spring onion stalks. But synthetic materials are almost always intertwined. One shot, "Milton," displays metal claws that would give an Iron Chef pause. The composition, created with the help of software that morphs original images into nonrepresentational forms, resembles puzzle pieces that have been rearranged and overlap. Most of the pieces involve some kind of mirrored or double images, and that adds a slight touch of circus whimsy -- if also a slightly dated '60s quality.

In "Boy," a whitish liquid cascades like a waterfall onto two rounded human forms. Elbows maybe? Hips, knees? With "Panda Or," the scene could be a belly button underwater. Barron's work invites such Rorschach-style guessing by offering glimpses of individual pores and other tiny textures blown up on massive scale. But the point isn't a game of Operation. It's mood, a menacing mood. Barron offers a raw, unsettling glimpse of something we vaguely recognize but can't comprehend, but it compels in an elemental way, much like the glimpse of the fetus in the womb at the end of Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey."

Part of what's unsettling about the photos is how clinical they are. White backgrounds dominate "In the Knee of the Curve," as if whatever bio-techno struggles going on before Barron's camera are happening in some clean room where people wear masks and safety goggles.

On a practical level, the large scale of the prints and the almost microscopic scrutiny make an ideal marriage of opposites. Barron inflates tiny minutia to epic proportions, creating a panoramic view using only a few millimeters.

Pushdot Studio, 830 N.W. 14th Ave. 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. today, last day of the show.

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## Mimicking the past, too well


David Lanthan Reamer's "The Strangers Lens" at the Newspace Center for Photography is reminiscent of a box of old photos you might find at a secondhand shop. The frayed portraits of people, cars and landscapes look like they were taken during the 1950s or thereabouts.


But these are not archival pictures; they're recently made. By mimicking the lives and events of people from the past, Reamer tinkers with our affection for nostalgia, and ingeniously, too: He feeds us a dose of the past with brilliantly executed photos of an old motor hotel (complete with developing fluid stains on the print), vintage Chevys and a subject in a pork pie hat.

But viewers may feel let down or even duped when, or if, they find out these aren't vintage pictures. (No explanation of how the pictures were made are noted in the gallery.) And that slips Reamer's project down a notch: These are great-looking photos that are little more than a clever ruse.

Also showing at Newspace is photographer Paul Hernandez, whose work, like Reamer's, has a strong conceptual component. But it's carried out more straightforwardly. Entitled "Nudes & Landscapes," the former rock band photographer's show consists mostly of portraits of thin, scantily clad women in dark but warm sepia tones. The work pays homage to masters such as Alfred Stieglitz and turn-of-the-century New Orleans photographer E.J. Bellocq. It's beautiful work, if a bit too familiar.

Newspace Center for Photography, 1632 SE 10th Ave., Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday-Sunday. Closes April 2.

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