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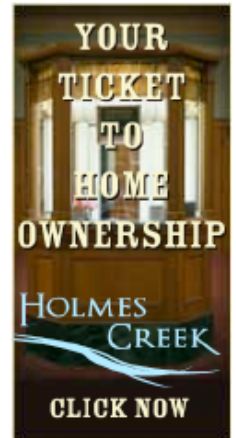


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ENTERTAINMENT



Sunday, September 2, 2007

Intricate mazes, cages Artist who studied at UNCG returns for a residency and an intriguing introductory show at the Weatherspoo

By Tom Patterson
JOURNAL COLUMNIST

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GREENSBORO - It's been a few years since Jane South last exhibited her work in the Piedmont Triad. She was represented in group exhibitions at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in 1997 - the year she received her master of fine arts degree from UNC Greensboro - and again in 2004, and at UNCG's Weatherspoon Art Museum in 2002.

Her work in those shows consisted of finely detailed, tightly structured line drawings, which she partially cut out and strategically folded at numerous points, transforming them into small, wall-mounted sculptures.

South, now living in Brooklyn, has continued to develop her work along those lines and has begun to earn a national reputation. Venues that have recently showed her work include the Drawing Center in New York and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. She has also received a couple of prestigious awards.

South and her work are returning to UNCG for a solo show at the Weatherspoon, an artist's residency and a related talk. Her exhibition, "Infrastructures," will be on view through Sept. 23, and she began her

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residency with the art department last Monday.

The idiosyncratic hybrid works she showed a few years back were inspired by industrial and architectonic forms. The imagery in these earlier works suggested metal grillwork, cables, hooks, girders and other industrial-strength structural components. The pieces were monochromatic, at least initially so, and miniature in scale.

Since then, South's visual reference points have remained constant as her work has gotten more chromatically varied, a lot bigger and far more structurally complex. There are only five three-dimensional pieces in her Weatherspoon show, along with six small, closely related drawings, but the meticulous detail and structural intricacy of the sculptures clearly represent many hours of painstaking effort. The works are all untitled, but each one carries a parenthetical, descriptive subtitle.

The most elaborately engineered works in South's show are the two large, wall-mounted pieces parenthetically subtitled *Long Gray Construction* and *Long Wheeled Construction*. They're about 5 feet high, between 9 and 11 feet wide and 1 to 2 feet deep. Their metallic-looking structural imagery is rendered in ink and acrylic on paper, albeit of a heavier grade than she used in her earlier, smaller works, and their internal armatures also incorporate balsa wood.

These mazelike pieces suggest assemblages made from scale models of industrial catwalks, fire escapes and segments of offshore oil derricks. Cages and other cagelike structures are more prominent and plentiful in these two big wall pieces than in her previous work, one of several features that call to mind prison architecture.

The scale of these works befits hamsters or rats, but studying and thinking about them prompts reflections on human concerns, such as this country's vastly overcrowded prison system and the overseas facilities housing individuals classed as "enemy combatants" in the "war on terror." The latter association is most pronounced in the show's freestanding centerpiece, subtitled *Skewed Box*, a single, diagonally skewed cage, large enough to tightly enclose an adult in a fetal position, with what appears to be a retractable handle at the top.

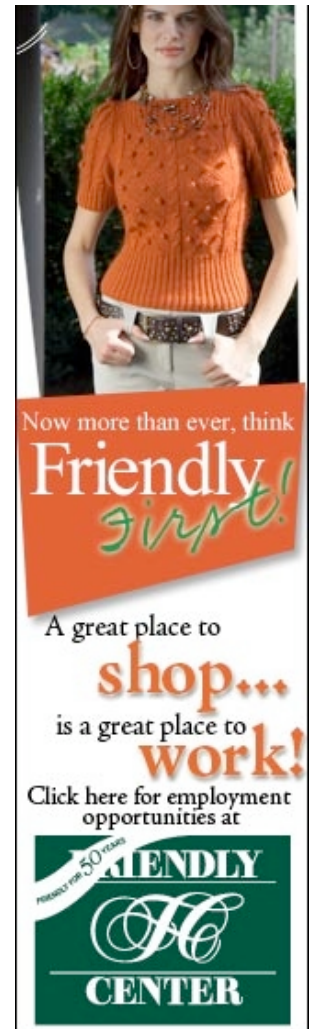
Such associations are among the reasons these three works seem thematically as well as physically heavier than South's previous work. They lack the whimsically humorous, Rube Goldbergesque quality of her earlier, smaller pieces, but that they demand to be taken more seriously obviously operates to South's advantage.

In a very different, almost festive vein, however, are the show's two small sculptures, both wall-mounted. As indicated by their descriptive subtitles, *Untitled (Yellow Fragment)* and *(Untitled) Cobalt Fragment*, they introduce notes of bold color into the show, and bring to mind a very different set of visual and thematic associations. The yellow piece is reminiscent of a slot machine, and the cobalt blue one looks like a mailbox crossed with a boom-box.

Earthy and unearthly sounds

While looking at South's exhibition, viewers can simultaneously experience the work in the adjacent gallery - Stephen Vitiello's "Night Chatter" - since it's a relatively loud, multichannel sound installation. But the optimal way to listen to Vitiello's piece is to walk into the gallery next door, where it's looped on a state-of-the-art surround-sound system, then lie down on the big futon in the center of the room and close your eyes.

Vitiello originally composed "Night Chatter" for an exhibition in London last year and has remixed it for the Weatherspoon. The piece combines the



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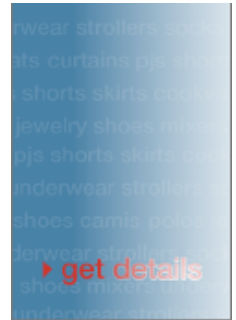
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nocturnal sounds of wildlife and water, recorded in Virginia's James River State Park and Cypress Bridge Forest, with electronic sounds generated by an analog synthesizer.

It's not always easy to distinguish between the natural and synthetic sounds, but their combined auditory effect is mesmerizing if you lie back and let them wash over you for a few minutes.

Vitiello has said that in creating the piece he wanted to connect the chattering sounds of insects and other wildlife with the contemporary surveillance term "chatter," referring to radio and telecommunications among potential terrorists. Maybe he'll elaborate on this idea in the talk about his work that he's set to give on Sept. 14.

■ Jane South's, "Infrastructure" and Stephen Vitiello's "Night Chatter" are on view through Sept. 23 at The Weatherspoon Art Museum, on the corner of Spring Garden and Tate streets in Greensboro. South will give a talk about her work at 5:30 p.m. Thursday; Vitiello will give a talk at 4 p.m. Sept. 14, both at the museum. For more information, call 336-334-5770.



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