

'Blind' ambition

by Abby Luby

The folks at Beacon Artist Union have created a fascinating exhibit that features the work of artists Chris Albert and Gary Jacketti.

Collaboration between artists is the buddy system personified. Creative energies bounce back and forth, providing motivational insurance, sometimes producing unique works of art with juxtaposing styles. Historically, there have been some great collaborations – Rembrandt with fellow Dutch artist Benjamin Gerritsz Cuyp, Gauguin and Van Gogh (which didn't actually turn out so well), sculptors Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, the performance pieces of the British team Gilbert and Sullivan, Jean Michel Basquiat, Andy Warhol and Francesco Clemente.

One essential element for this type of creative partnership is communication. Getting together, chewing the fat, mulling over ideas at dinner, even sharing a studio can keep the collaboration alive and growing. The stream of ideas between artists is, overall, part of the dual creative process – one that transforms ideas to a concrete object, which might be a completely different work from what was originally planned.

But what if artists change the way they communicate? What if they vow not to talk to one another about the project in person for months and just share ideas via e-mail? What kind of collaborative work could be created?

The current show at the Beacon Artist Union in Beacon, "blind offline," is the result of just this type of collaboration. Artists Chris Albert and Gary Jacketti proposed to electronically communicate artistic ideas for four months while each created nine pieces using the same guidelines. The 18 works were hung by another artist, Matt Kinney, who first saw the work the day he hung the show at the Beacon Artist Union gallery – adding another "blind" dimension to the collaborative process.

The result is a diverse, playful, surprisingly cohesive show.

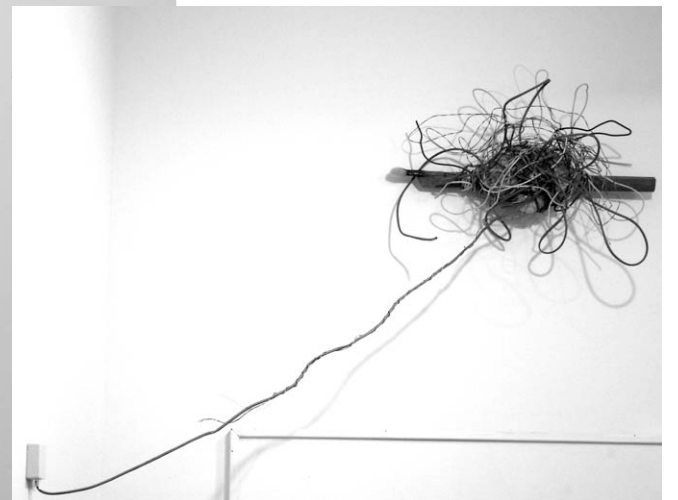
The zany, let-loose works by Albert are contrasted by the grounded, solidified Jacketti pieces. A few thematic guidelines allowed each artist to produce pieces that were conceptually identical but visually dissimilar.

Both artists, whose e-mail code names were "iccupoo" (Albert) and "graystraightjacket" (Jacketti), agreed to produce two sculptures, two paintings, two drawings, one woodcut, one mosaic and one relief sculpture. Each prospective piece was described in more than 100 e-mails, which are printed out and hang from a pole in the gallery. Both artists had no idea of what the other was doing. The surprise came opening day, when Albert and Jacketti first saw each other's work and realized how differently they each interpreted the guidelines.

Jacketti and Albert each worked on two pieces they described in their e-mails as a "cube," with the only parameters being a 2-foot square made of wood. Jacketti created his cubes out of 2-foot square pieces of plywood with sleekly applied black rubber tire treads. One is in the shape of a triangle with a rubber tread for the bottom, the other is made up of three sturdy opened wood "pages" rounded out with the tread – very compact and well defined. Both are corner pieces that anchor



"bau 9: blind offline"
Beacon Artist Union, 161 Main St.,
Beacon
Through Oct. 2
Hours: Saturdays and Sundays,
noon-6 p.m.
845.591.2331
www.beaconartistunion.com



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the show. Albert's cubes, however, used wood scraps of varying shapes, colors and sizes, wildly bolted and screwed together in a splat-like configuration. Kinney's keen eye saw to hang Albert's cubes from the ceiling, accentuating their multi-dimensionality.

Two featureless, rubber facemasks used for CPR training were curious springboards for each artist. It was the one piece that shared identical material. Some e-mail discussions about the masks first considered connecting them via the mouths with wire, symbolizing electronic communication to complement the show's theme. But, over the course of time, the e-mails show that both artists thought the idea trite. The masks ultimately were not connected. Albert's mask was obliterated with a spaghetti-entanglement of colored cables and wires, while Jacketti's mask is hung simply by the ears between two small wooden posts with a single gold chain dangling from the mouth.

That Matt Kinney curated the show without previewing the work became another layer of blindness leading to the hands-off collaboration – the two driving themes of the show. This hands-off approach for both artists and curator is akin to holding a hot potato for an instant and then gleaning ideas from the heat for a week or month to create a specific work – a process that is truly dedicated to conceptual art.

Artists Albert and Jacketti are members of

Clockwise from top left:
"Resurrection" (detail), a
combined diptych by
Gary Jacketti/Chris Albert;
"graystraightjacketwired"
(detail), mixed media, by Gary
Jacketti; and "Cube 1," rubber
and plywood, by Gary Jacketti.



the Beacon Artist Union, a group of artists that has continually produced conceptual "think" shows that are on the edge. "blind online" serves up the idea that words are limited when it comes to describing visual detail, but can alternately be the active

catalyst for a multitude of imagined works of art, creating a smorgasbord for any artist's creative appetite.

The show runs weekends through Sunday, Oct. 2. For information, call 845.591.2331, or visit www.beaconartistunion.com. ■