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Techno Colored: Jim Lambie at Goss- Michael

By PETER SIMEK | May 4, 2011

It's hard not to get giddy in Jim Lambie's show in the front rooms of the Goss-Michael Foundation's Design District home. Stepping in off deserted, wind swept Turtle Creek Blvd – lorded over now by an island of apartments seemingly torn from an urban erector set – Lambie has transformed the Goss-Michael space into a vibrant visual oasis, a perky little rabbit hole that will give your doldrums a bit of the old one-two.

That the work here feels exuberant owes everything to the floor, but more on that later. Lambie is a DJ, he pulls from the iconography of the discotheque, and like a music-mixer, there is something of the conjurer in him – that quiet, studied man at the center of the party who moves the emotion of the crowd like the moon moves the sea, that is, barely noticeably.

At Goss-Michael, we have a handful of Lambie's wall sculptures, amalgamations of readymades or surrealist-leaning compositions that address perception and cognition by playing with layers, obstructing space, and always revealing and concealing. The Doors (Morrison Hotel) is an undulation of white wooden door pieces across the wall, hidden mirrors at the apex reflecting a zig-zag of light across the gallery wall. Get Yr Freak On (2008) consists of a single door decorated with dozens of door knobs. There is a door frame, and positioned at an angle to the wall, the door seems to open into the gallery. Peek around and you find a mirror where the open space behind the door should be, creating the visual effect that suggests the gallery space continues in – or is being sucked into – the non-existent other side. Untitled, 2008 is hung on the wall – chairs cut apart and rearranged, creating a cluttered, irrational form that renders them useless while repositioning the chair bits in a way that is formally coherent. Two handbags slung over the chair legs balance its studied composition, while the casual presence of the bags suggests narrative. Whose bags are these? Why were they left on the chairs? What violence rearranged this pastiche? This is a Dadaist mash-up that teeters on expressionism.



All of Lambie's sculptural work here actively involves the viewer in the process of looking and deciphering, while existing in dialogue with the space itself – hiding it, involving it, morphing it, befuddling it. The installation that dominates this exhibition, however, accentuates and articulates the gallery space. Using strips of colored plastic tape, the artist traces the perimeter of two gallery rooms and a bit of the hallway in between, creating a kind of skin that covers the floor in a radiant, geometric pattern. Through meticulous repetition (truth be told, these days done by gallery assistants and not the artist himself), the tape acts like the tip of a doodling pencil, tracing the edges of rooms, following bends in the wall, entryways and passageways. The shape of these perimeter changes echo through the form that covers the entirety of the floor. While we might imagine galleries to be perfect boxes, Lambie's piece discovers subtle eccentricities brought to life by the conglomeration of rectangular forms on the gallery floor that come together with satisfying asymmetry.



The work here is as much method as it is object making, and the installation a process wherein the artist can directly engage in a conversation with the space he is working in. The space, after all, and not the artist dictates the shape of the finished product. There is a joke here too, as Lambie plays with the preciousness of the gallery space (Don't touch the art! Oh, wait. You're standing on it). But mostly it is there to excite our experience of the room, to blend everything together like a seamless pop hook.