

Cody Ledvina at Pablo Cardoza Gallery

Cody Ledvina's show titled "Crawfish Ledvina" is currently on display at Pablo Cardoza Gallery. Ledvina's body of work reads a lot like a group show. I use those two words specifically because the artwork changes significantly from piece to piece (hence the word "group"), and the "show" part refers to the artist who pulls the audience in while charismatically discussing the work multiple times throughout the evening.

Understanding the array of artwork on display is key to understanding the artist's thinking. Ledvina has high energy and, when not making art, always seems to be going from one place to another. It is not his prerogative to focus on one body of work; there is no time for that, as other ideas are calling. A significant aspect of this constant change comes from the materials; his current choice is self-described as "garbage," which essentially means any material he encounters that is no longer valued or desired by its original owner. Their loss is his gain, including discarded stickers, yarn, kiddie toys, knick-knacks, figurative posters, and other junk that most would overlook, not seeing the transformative potential it holds to become art. The show also features some hand-drawn and painted elements, showcasing diversity in making and a high level of craftsmanship. One is his large Jesus Christ drawing transformed into something of a 2D action hero with movable parts; the other is a self-portrait watercolor of a docile, plant-eating dinosaur.

Ledvina is tall and has a strong presence, and everyone seems to know him. He is boisterous, and I can't remember the last time I saw so many people smiling at an opening. Each art piece was mostly discussed by Ledvina in terms of ideation, viewing the work through his wide-angle view of anything-from-life-could-be-art approach. His subject matter ranged from Dr. Kevorkian to a green-headed Jesus on the run (my favorite piece), twigs spelling out a phrase, images of dogs found in a discarded 7-foot poster, "white crimes," and other things I can't recall. All of this was received with amusement by the gallery-goers. Some of the positive vibe came from the flowing Modelo and wine, but a bigger part of it is the unique camaraderie Pablo Cardoza creates at his space, which is distinctive from larger galleries as a smaller, more casual place with smart programming that prioritizes artists over collectors. Both Ledvina and Cardoza share a desire to connect with local artists and to push the Houston art scene forward. In short, they help people, and that feels good, especially as we are all still getting out of the long wake of Covid.

In exploring thematic connections for this show, a darker side of life occasionally emerges. It was explained that Jesus, depicted with a green head—a motif originating in the Middle Ages, signified death. There is a wooden apple sculpture filled with black waste, looking toxic. Everyone knows the word dinosaur is synonymous with extinction, and that motif is used for an artist's portrait. "White crimes" doesn't sound particularly

optimistic, more like jail time (a form of purgatory death). The pale, ghostly image of Dr. Kevorkian is shrouded in death. However, this is only one aspect of his work, which can be balanced by several other artworks with very different content. Just look online at his participation in a three-person show at the Galveston Arts Center, and you will find many bas-relief sculptures of human butts made from beach sand, the content of which appears to be "beach bums." What his next show holds is wholly unpredictable, but I look forward to it.