

Cody Ledvina at Pablo Cardoza Gallery

Cody Ledvina's show entitled "Crawfish Ledvina" is currently on view at Pablo Cardoza gallery. Ledvina's body of work reads a lot like a group show. I use those two words specifically as the artwork changes significantly from piece to piece (hence the word "group"), and the "show" part is in reference to the artist who pulls the audience in while charismatically speaking about the work various times throughout the night.

Understanding the array of artwork displayed is to understand the thinking of the artist. 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 stay on one body of work that is focused; there is no time for that as other ideas are calling. A big part of this constant change stems from materials; his current choice is self-described as "garbage", which really means any material he comes across that is no longer loved or desired by the original owner. Their loss is his gain, such as discarded stickers, yarn, kiddy toys, knick-knacks, figurative posters, and other junk the rest of us would walk by, not seeing the transformative potential it has to manifest as art. There is some hand drawing and painting in the show as well to show more diversity in making and an ample level of craft. One is his large Jesus Christ drawing made into something of a 2D action hero with movable parts, the other a self-portrait watercolor as a docile, plant-eating dinosaur.

Ledvina is tall, 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 discussed by Ledvina mostly in terms of ideation of the work via his wide-angle view of anything-from-life- could-be-art approach. His subject matter veered from Dr. Kevorkian, green-headed Jesus on the run (my favorite piece), twigs that spell out a phrase, finding images of dogs in a 7' thrown-out poster, "white crimes," and other things I can't recall. All of this landed with gallery goers with amusement. Some of those good vibes stemmed from the flowing Modelo and wine. A much bigger part of it is the special camaraderie that Pablo Cardoza creates at his space, which is distinctive from the bigger galleries, as a smaller, more casual place with smart programming that is ultimately more in service of artists and a little less for collectors. Together, and this cannot be overstated, Ledvina and Cardoza both share a quality of wanting to know local artists and a deep desire to push the Houston art scene forward. In short, they help people. And that feels good, particularly as we are all still getting out of the long wake of Covid.

In search of thematic connections for this show, a darker side of life is sometimes present. It was explained that Jesus painted with a green head, first done in the Middle Ages, signified death. There is a wooden apple sculpture with black waste in it, looking toxic. Everyone knows the word dinosaur is synonymous with extinction, and that motif is used for an artist portrait.

“White crimes” doesn’t sound particularly optimistic, more like jail time (a form of purgatory death). And the pale ghostly image of Dr. Kevorkian is shrouded in death. However, this is only one side of his work and can be countered by several other artworks with much different content. Just glance online at his participation in a 3 person show at the Galveston Arts Center and you will encounter many bas-relief sculptures of human butts made from beach sand, the content of which appears to be “beach bums”. What is in store for his next show is wholly unpredictable, but I will look forward to it.