

Stall

Haggerty Gallery

Reviewed by Kelli Connell

Stall is the first exhibition devoted to installation art at Haggerty Gallery. Under the curatorial vision of Christine Bisetto, Gallery Director, Haggerty Gallery has become one of the premiere spaces in Texas to house exciting and smart contemporary art. For *Stall*, Bisetto invited Paul Booker, Polly Lanning, Terri Thornton and Keitha Lowrance to work simultaneously on installations. During this intense process, the artists continually made changes to their own as a response to work being installed around them. The gallery was divided into four equal parts by a T-shaped partition of moveable walls in the center. While standing in each of the four quadrants, it was possible to glimpse parts of the adjacent work. This shared communication created a cohesive dialogue, both visually and aurally.

Paul Booker's fluid and energetic work created an exciting environment for his three-piece installation. Booker's *As If* is thoughtful and taunting. Hundreds of small, arrow-shaped plastic pieces float on the wall held by tiny pins. On the left side, the arrows are black; enveloping the word "as" which is transparent. On the right, the arrows are transparent, and the "if" text is black. As the arrows swirl on their respective sides of the wall, they move in a happenstance pattern towards each other, finally meeting in the center of the wall between two raised, parallel white lines. The gossip-like font of the text creates an uncomfortable, yet humorous moment of communication. Viewed from its inception as a thought, speech, then as an afterthought resonating across the wall it reminded me of the "Valley Girl": hands on hips, eyebrows raised, lips curled while pouting, "As IF!" before tossing her hair over her shoulder and walking out the door.

Booker's *Three-Inch Dash* is made of hundreds of loosely hand-drawn rectangles on blue plastic. These quirky shapes ripple and swirl into tide pools, or subgroups, which visually undulate across the wall. Accompanying the unfolding of this piece, are the sounds from Keitha Lowrance's video that is in the stall



Paul Booker, *Three Inch Dash*, 2002 (foreground)
Installation, mixed media
Polly Lanning, *Isle Royale*, 2002 (background)
Installation, acrylic on baltic birch plywood
Courtesy of Beatrice M. Haggerty Gallery

next door. Water spraying from a fountain, blinds clicking together, and the subtle sounds of a moving escalator interact audibly with Booker's patterns of dashes. Similar in style, Booker's *Limelight* is made of several sketchy rectangles, varying in size and distance from the wall. These amoebic shapes and their shadows shimmer and dance up the wall in a free, yet ordered, formation that is reminiscent of moonlight reflecting on water. Booker's installation is a break-through in his working process; these three pieces overcome the confined boundaries of his smaller works and flow freely across the walls.

Moving from the energetic to the contemplative, we step into Polly Lanning's stall. Unlike Booker's installation, Lanning creates a space that needs to be digested in parts so that the meaning of the whole becomes apparent. Ten small plywood rectangles are stacked on the floor; each covered with several layers of pink paint. Like a stacked cake, the subtle icing pink lines lets the process of her work show through, as the plywood gives evidence to her choice of materials. Leaning against the south wall are ten overlapping plywood rectangles, approximately three feet in height.

Each piece has segments painted in a shade of turquoise, allowing the raw plywood to become an essential voice in the work. Placed higher on the wall and to the right of the leaning pieces, a vertical line of diamond-shaped melon paint swatches adds to Lanning's color palette and speaks about the history of her installation from inception to completion.

Painted on the adjacent wall is a large turquoise rectangle which gives evidence to Lanning's working process by revealing patches of brush strokes at the top while the sides and bottom are masked to create perfect lines. Sitting on top of this impromptu ground are several pieces of plywood of various sizes and thickness, each masked with lines created from masking tape. To the left is a mid-size painting that incorporates all of the colors in Lanning's installation; this piece is the cornerstone of Lanning's work. The tedious process of layering, stripping, and re-layering paint expresses her concerns with beauty while revealing the passing of time, which is essential to her working method.

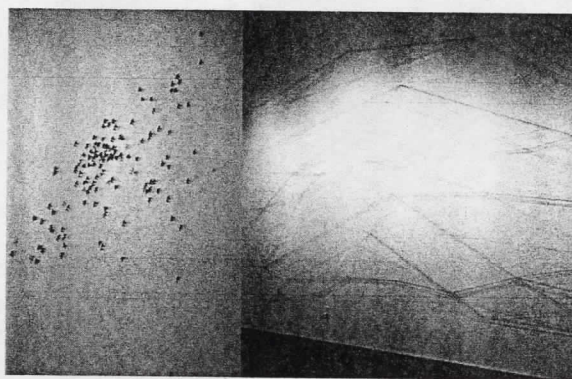
The only piece of Lanning's that utilizes the inner moveable walls is a row of snapshot-sized photographs. These vivid images mimic the color palette used in her painted works: out-of-focus pink flowers, a black iron door with the image of a bird soaring, and an empty chair sitting on the patio of a turquoise house. This constructed imagery acts as a recovered memory. An essential part of Lanning's installation, these photographs give evidence of time passing, beauty, and the construction of meaning from raw materials. Hence, the artist's use of snapshot imagery opposed to photographs printed laboriously in the darkroom.

Next-door is Terri Thornton's subtle, yet powerful installation. Resembling a topo-

graphical map, *Sound Drawing* is made of several thin, amoeba-like ellipses of black tape, one inside the other, rippling across the floor with the outermost ring crawling up the wall. The lines in each ripple are broken in places to create small pauses. Almost unnoticeable, the letters "shhhhhshsh" or "SHSHSHHHHssshhhshsh" are repeated several times within the lines. The text in the piece along with the application of each line is non-threatening and calm, like taking in a slow breath, whispering softly, then smiling. During the opening of *Stall*, viewers mirrored the movement in *Sound Drawing* by quietly plunking, knees bent, to get a closer look at the floor, then moving to the outer ring of the piece while whispering to other cautious viewers.

The two floating walls in Thornton's space are covered with a multitude of small ink scribbles on uplifted areas of white-painted wax, each one about half an inch in diameter. From a distance, *Wall Wounds (pocs 2)* seems to be nothing more than an organized pattern of small polka dots. Taking a closer look is like peering through a microscope to reveal pores or past scars of the gallery walls. These nipple-like drawings breath and ooze a past host of old nail holes patched and re-painted over for what feels like an eternity.

At first glance, these are the only two works noticed in Thornton's space. Walking through the installation a second time, I noticed that several gallery lights illuminated the outside walls. Here Thornton has painted large, faint rectangles that virtually go unnoticed. Reminiscent of walking into a house of smokers to find traces of where pictures had been, Thornton's subtle *tattoo drawing on ghost skin* acts as an unsolved mystery. Here viewers stare at the walls to see if there is anything they might have missed. Along with the rectangles are a few white-on-white organically painted patches. Thornton's work addresses the acts of covering and uncovering past events in gallery spaces—the whispering of guests, the removal of artwork and the



Paul Booker, *As If*, 2002 (foreground)

Installation, mixed media

Keitha Lowrance, *Untitled (String Thing 5)*, 2002 (background)

Installation, mixed media

Courtesy of Beatrice M. Haggerty Gallery

patching and repainting of holes in the walls. What makes the work compelling is that it also speaks of uncovering, and listening to, our own personal histories.

The last stall houses Keitha Lowrance's work which actually floods out of her space, both physically and aurally. The impressive *Untitled (String Thing 5)* can be seen from all other quadrants in the gallery, and her video *Lines: (esc.,wat.,bli.)* provides the soundtrack for her work, as well as the other installations on view. This is not the first time that I have seen Lowrance's intricate web-like installations, however this one is the most impressive. During the opening of *Stall*, I entered through one of the two gallery entrances to find myself cocooned in Lowrance's piece—only to see several strings criss-crossing and clinging to the corner I was trapped in. Backtracking, I entered through the other door. *Untitled (String Thing 5)* is made of black and white strings that travel and twist around more than 130 drywall screws from floor to ceiling in a random pattern. The strings engulf the 46-foot north wall, stretch across half of the west wall, and web into a small corner on the east wall. Alluding to the artist's color palette in

her paintings, the black and white string lines create another layer of beautiful gray shadows, giving even more depth to the work. Tying *Stall* together, Lowrance's installation not only suggests the shared communication among artists, but also acts as a visual representation of several sound waves colliding to erect a mountain of conversations and sounds passing through space.

Inspired by the sounds which surround her, Lowrance's video *Lines: (esc.,wat.,bli.)* does more than study the sounds of an escalator humming, a fountain splashing, and blinds clicking

together. While watching this mesmerizing video, it is evident that Lowrance, through the repetition of lines, is also speaking about subtleties often missed in everyday life. The movement of the lines in the escalator sequence is dizzying and captivating. Like Bridget Riley's paintings, these lines fool the eye: our vision transfixed on the up and down motion while at the same time making sense of the repetitive vertical lines on each step creates a sense on vertigo. I am reminded of a recent encounter where this trickery caused me to miss my step; a not-so-graceful plunge down a couple of steps followed before I regained my balance.

The success of *Stall* lies in part with Christine Bisetto's keen vision as a curator but also through the collaborative efforts of each artist. As Bisetto's insightful title suggests, *Stall* asks the viewers to pause in each separate niche to contemplate the clever conceptual installation that surrounds them. Thus, *Stall* functions as a cohesive collection of works communicating with each other, while simultaneously creating a sense of surprise, and offering insight into the individual artists' minds.