

Detroit Art Review

Nancy Pletos & Henry Crissman @ Simone DeSousa Gallery

April 25, 2019 by Glen Mannisto

Nancy Pletos: “Besides, I did not want to do anything but be here” and Henry Crissman at Simone DeSousa Gallery



Nancy Pletos & Henry Crissman @ Simone DeSousa Gallery Installation Image, Courtesy of DAR

Continuing to focus on the local art landscape, Simone DeDousa Gallery has combined Detroit history and future in two solo exhibitions in the work of Cass Corridor artist Nancy Pletos, one of the central figures of that moment in Detroit’s vibrant art scene and Henry Crissman. Crissman, like Pletos, is an innovative, multidisciplinary young artist whose ever adventurous exploration of materials and forms challenges notions of artistic production and aesthetic value.

Taken from her personal writings, the title of Pletos’ exhibition, “Besides, I did not want to do anything but be there,” encapsulates Pletos’ conception of her engagement with the personal, ever private, use of everyday materials of everyday life in her work. She gathered, and made, the bits and pieces of mirror, beads, dried flowers, even banal building materials such as Masonite and pine molding, constructing, small intriguing objects and large elaborate sculptures and complex wall sculpture/drawings. It was a modest desire and modest project that ended up as a diverse and complex engagement with artistic process and vision.

SIMONE DESOUSA GALLERY
444 W. Willis, #112, Detroit, MI 48201
313.833.9000 | simonedesousagallery.com



Nancy Pletos, "Yellow Spiral /Farm IV," 1978, Wood, wooden beads, paint, glue, mirror glass, craft jewels, shellac

Her iconic works are elaborate vertical sculptures composed of thousands of wooden flower and plant petals cut on a small, manual miter box from various sized quarter-round pine molding. — each piece of molding, glued together to create flowers and plant petals. Throughout her work there is evidence of a preoccupation with mathematics and geometry and even a consideration of the role of geometry in the formation of DNA and the Genetic code. Beside the geometry of flowers her large "Yellow Spiral/Farm IV," as well as many of her plants representations, resemble the spiral construction of the double helix chain of nucleotides that carries the genetic instruction for reproduction for all living organisms.

SIMONE DESOUSA GALLERY
444 W. Willis, #112, Detroit, MI 48201
313.833.9000 | simonedesousagallery.com



Nancy Pletos, "Parental Guidance (2)," 1982, Wood, mailing cardboard, found objects, paint, shellac. With "Library" in foreground.

All of Pletos's work is a nod to either nature's or man's built world, of how things— whether flower, or animal, or building—fit together to compose the world. Sculptures of elaborate flowering plants, cartooned sections of wooden logs, miniature buildings and jewel-like architectural details. There is a progression from the small "occasional" objects to her elaborate sculptures and her wall collages that, like amber inclusions with entrapped insects, are filled with "found objects." Her wall relief "Parental Guidance" is gorgeous construction of an assortment of humble objects and images embedded in a thick amber shellac that seem to compose a narrative from her life. Including children's toys and silhouettes of heads and hands, birds and

SIMONE DESOUSA GALLERY
 444 W. Willis, #112, Detroit, MI 48201
 313.833.9000 | simonedesousagallery.com

butterflies, “Parental Guidance” is, like amber inclusions of fossilized insects, a personal time capsule that composes a frozen moment into a beautifully “drawn” structure that occupies a brilliant intersection of science, mathematics, a deep passion for nature and personal memory.



Henry Crissman, “New Balance # 1 & #2,” 2019, oil paint, oil pastel, vinyl New Balance advertisement

Henry Crissman’s new work occupies the “Edition” side of the Simone DeSousa Gallery and as such seems to suggest an introduction of Crissman’s work to the DeSousa collection of artists. Two large paintings and eight ceramic works introduce us to a mix of expressionist painting and a diverse group of aggressively kitschy ceramics, including a chia-pet self-portrait (that’s a guess), a Transformer chicken/eagle and “Bust,” which is a mass of ceramic, epoxy and molten plastic bottles, all of which test the limits of material and form. Crissman suggested that painting was the ultimate model and stimulus for his work and the overall effect of his work reveals as much. He has always painted his energetically expressive ceramics with abandon.



Henry Crissman, "Bust," 2019, plastic bottle, ceramic, epoxy.

The two paintings are painted on appropriated vinyl from New Balance athletic shoe advertisements. Other than to redact its corporate BS message by hiding or blocking it out with spectacular color, how much the ad was a prompt for the paintings marks is up for grabs. With the loose, scroll-like, vinyl hanging like an unstretched canvas, Crissman's New Balance paintings hang comfortably like a banner, rather than with the pretension of a painting. In both there is a depiction of a head with a semi-readable text insinuated, as well as dates and numbers. In many of Crissman's previous ceramic pieces, as in the New Balance paintings, there are messages to the viewer, phone numbers, even an invitation to call him, creating a seamless, personal aesthetic that combined with the expressionistic painting becomes a diaristic narrative. In conversation Crissman suggested that each of the ceramic works are plays on personal incidents or "stories" as well. Echoing Nancy Pletos' exhibition title, Crissman said: "I am constantly thrilled to be in the world, to be translating my experience into objects, onto surfaces, not to fetishize but to celebrate.



Nancy Pletos, Installation view of logs, 1975, Plywood, paint.

Nancy Pletos “Besides, I did not want to do anything but be here”
and Henry Crissman at Simone DeSousa Gallery Through May 25, 2019

SIMONE DESOUSA GALLERY
444 W. Willis, #112, Detroit, MI 48201
313.833.9000 | simonedesousagallery.com