

Artists get nostalgic

LoCicero evokes warmth in his emotional recall while Geschke is cold, clear-eyed and ironic

Visual arts

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BY MATTHEW KANGAS • *Special to The Seattle Times*

Two artists exhibiting this month in Pioneer Square galleries shamelessly exploit nostalgia and limit its impact to aspects of everyday life: pop culture, second-hand stores, memories of idealized childhoods. Yet Patrick LoCicero at Grover/Thurston and Erik Geschke at Esther Claypool differ sharply in tone. The former is knee-deep in a warm bath of emotional recall; the latter is cold and ironic, questioning whether we control memories of pop culture, or whether such memories control us.

LoCicero's painted collages are as comfy as an old couch. No intimidating confrontations here. Instead, viewers enter a world in which backgrounds of familiar objects such as matchbook covers, old ledger books and seed packets set down a rhythm for larger, isolated images laid over the collage-ground. They intensify the mood of remembrance by elevating potent symbols of a quieter time: children's toys, men's fedora hats, old lawn furniture and bow ties.

As we're drawn into each painting, reveling in its reassuring pattern of meticulously preserved artifacts, it becomes increasingly apparent that this is an idealized world, one which never really existed outside the 39-year-old artist's imagination. Exquisite vintage tricycles, toy airplanes, spinning metal tops and an old gumball machine are triggers for our own memories, not a reflection of specific reality. LoCicero's vision has captured it all for our enjoyment.

Although younger at 29, Geschke is far more ambivalent about a fondly remembered past. A 1993 Cornish College graduate (where LoCicero has taught since 1997), the Seattle native also manipulates our relation to nostalgia but adds puzzling and occasionally threatening twists.

Where LoCicero is cuddly and misty, Geschke is clear-eyed and cold. His deadpan sensibility reveals an intel-

llectual distance. His wall-mounted sculptures and paintings are each about completely different ideas.

"Loss of Color, He and She" pairs carved and painted wooden male and female heads above vertical wooden boxes with brightly painted holes. Like odd taxidermy samples, this work and "Something to Look Forward To" use smiling heads to set up a contrast between cheerfulness and fear.

Sometimes the various elements just do not add up to anything and the whole piece collapses into tired surrealist formulas. Geschke's considerable craftsmanship (woodcarving, painting, welding) can be an asset and a liability. It can never redeem a bad idea.

However, his take on nostalgia filtered through the Disney Channel will delight and no doubt irritate many viewers. A little irony can go a long way and Geschke can cover miles with his.



VISUAL ARTS REVIEW

"Patrick LoCicero"

At Grover/Thurston Gallery, 309 Occidental Ave. S., Seattle, through May 29. Hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays.