



Chris Joy, August 2005 #4, styrofoam, 2005.

Hurricane Katrina ripped open the American value system, creating a fissure in our celebrity-obsessed, corporate-dominated culture. In an exhibition opening on the eve of the fourth anniversary of 9/11, curator Margaret Roleke established an essential, grassroots dialogue illuminating the American penchant for safety at any cost. Security is precisely what was undermined at Branchville Gallery.

This was evident in the work of June Ahrens and Chris Joy. Here observers/participants were invited to embark on a visceral experience out of the media's reach, one that was not only illuminating but potentially transformative. In an earlier commemoration of 9/11, Ahrens had built heart-shaped installations from individual fabric pockets that were also heart-shaped and filled with personal messages.

The unifying component was safety pins. In subsequent exhibitions, Ahrens created symbols of decay and resurrection on the walls by linking these utilitarian objects. Reacting to the perpetual threat of global conflict, she launched a narrative exploring a new paradigm in which knowledge of global interconnectedness can potentially lead to the transformation of America's insatiable appetite for security.

Her Branchville installation, titled *The Loudness of Silence*, deconstructs the safety pin, pushing its purpose to the anxiety resulting from a crumbling linear worldview and the human fear of surrendering the natural cycle of life/death/rebirth. She uses the wall as a canvas,

engaging perspective and temporality. Black safety pins are now straight pins randomly attached to the wall, communicating with the open holes that held them together.

The visual narration is extended to black shapes from a glue gun and round white plaster appendages shaded into crescent forms. A hole cut directly into the wallboard provides a view of the building interior; the self-containment of negative/positive forms narrates the dance of light and shadow across the surface.

The effect is both cosmic and intimate, like being inside a lunar landscape while experiencing an eclipse, when formerly repressed tensions rise to the surface. In the other half of the gallery is Chris Joy's impression of gooey cake: high in immediate gratification and low in nutrition. His untitled installation consists of slices of cotton-candy-colored Styrofoam glued in several layers and deconstructed on the surface with numerous applications of spray paint.

On the walls, the artist reveals his process of shading geometrical shapes through the buildup of surface pigment with masking tape marking indefinite borders between forms.

The opposites-anxiety and desire-create a wonderful tension between these two installations. This mirrors the conflict America is attempting to dispel through its obsession with national security. As the Gulf Coast disaster informs our entrance into Roleke's pertinent grassroots dialogue, one leaves this exhibition asking how much longer America can have its security cake and eat it too. Joy's sculpture may appear scrumptious, but Ahrens's reminds us that we need to look beyond the surface to find our true emotional substance. *Lisa Paul Streitfeld*



June Ahrens, *The Loudness of Silence* (detail), 2005.

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David Moneypenny at Manchester Community College/Manchester, CT

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