

Columbia Spectator
February 5th, 2008

One Man's Art Is Another Man's Living Room In This Show

— By CATHERINE KAELIN

The LeRoy Neiman Gallery's current exhibition "The Leisure Suite" may remind you a bit of your dorm room. Tom Sanford's unframed painting *Hamburger* (2007) is casually tacked to the wall, adjacent to Colby Bird's *Untitled (Fridge)* (2006), an open mini-fridge containing sixteen forties of malt liquor stacked on a shelf propped up by what looks like a ruler.

The gallery, which is run entirely by School of the Arts students, is housed in Dodge Hall. While easily overlooked, its convenient and quiet location makes it an ideal stop between classes. If you're not making a trip back to your East Campus suite, "The Leisure Suite" in Dodge is an inspiring substitute.

Beth Campbell's *House: Room 1* and *House: Room 2* (2001) capture two angles of a bedroom that might also look familiar. A low, unmade twin bed occupies the back corner. A pillow peeks out from underneath, beside a "How to Quit Smoking" manual that lies on the floor. A pink, plastic brush and a few bottles of nail polish are strewn atop an unostentatious dresser.

The images, objects, and videos that make up "The Leisure Suite" are comforting in their familiarity, but also unsettling. By working within an aesthetic that permeates most of our daily lives, curator Martin Basher (MFA '08) and the 14 artists in the show ask us to approach familiar images in a context different from the one to which we are accustomed.

"I wanted to look at ways that people are engaging with contemporary life and contemporary leisure time," Basher said. The works in the show each take a different approach to depicting modern life, some in a more overtly critical way than others.

Tim Davis' *McDonald's II* shows the all-too-familiar McDonald's logo reflected in the top-story window of a modest house, unsuccessfully shielded by a wooden fence. Davis' photograph serves as a more overt critique of an invasive, neon-lit commercialism.

Andrew Barber, however, leaves his work more open to interpretation. His painting, a bird's eye view of a tennis court, is not only difficult to recognize at first glance but also tucked away in a small enclave at the back of the gallery, adding to its subtlety in contrast to some of the other works.

Untitled photographs by Michael Schmelling demonstrate yet another way in which modern identities are intimately tied to the material world. His images feature piles of both purposeful and purposeless household items. The clutter is viewed from an angle that simultaneously places the

viewer above it and creates the impression that the piles could fall and crush you at any moment.

“Michael Schmelling’s photographs depict the houses of people with obsessive compulsive hoarding disorders,” Basher explained, “but I also think that they’re very beautiful. In their own way they give a little bit of honor and pride back to the people that live in those places, they show that the stuff is organized and cared for despite the sense of craziness and disarray.”

“The Leisure Suite” demands that viewers question our own daily lives and culture. By placing middle-class values and mass-produced images in a fine art context, the exhibition suggests that they must be examined, enabling the frightening possibility of finding something wrong with them, and in turn, with us.