

LUCKY DEBELLEVUE AT COSMO'S P3: SCULPTING WITH PIPE CLEANERS AND PAINTING WITH INKED RUBBER



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Lucky DeBellevue is an artist of materials—from pistachio shells to weather stripping. The P3Studio artist-in-residence got major art-world attention in 2002 with his monumental pipe-cleaner sculptures exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In DeBellevue's hands, the pipe cleaner is more wire than fuzz, a building material accreted into structures that are, by turns, solid, ephemeral, witty, beautiful and strange.

In DeBellevue's *Collaboration/Exchange* open studio at the Cosmopolitan, pipe cleaners are the medium of an interactive artwork; participants twist and hook their contributions to DeBellevue's armature, creating a fuzzy, webby, futuristic object with a vaguely utilitarian purpose: Prototype for a whimsical laser curtain? Intergalactic thermal quilt? P3Studio participants also select from a trove of abstract rubber blocks, ink up and stamp, leaving one print on the gallery wall and taking the other as souvenir.

But DeBellevue's own paintings-in-progress grab focus. They feature motifs made from abstract rubber stamps collected over a decade; the shapes recall hieroglyphs, or the ancient scripts of Sumer and Palmyra. DeBellevue prints on painted linen ground, not once but twice or more, delivering visual echoes of the original impression. In contrast to the flamboyant pipe-cleaner sculptures, his paintings have a muted, earthy palette. The color, shapes and eroded images combine to produce an elusive exoticism. Mayan? Zulu? Another series—block-print checkerboards—pings both Modernism and naiveté. Some paintings are doubled/tripled and cut to display a “flap” that reveals a mirror image of the surface. It drapes from the frame like a tongue.

While DeBellevue's show summons various critical debates—art vs. craft, high art vs. low art, intention vs. purpose—they miss the point. This work is first about material, then about pattern.

A fascination with repetition, whether of structure or motif, is at the heart of DeBellevue's current practice. One wall at P3Studio, for

example, is stamped with rows of rectangles and used as a backdrop for printed works—pattern on top of pattern. The patterns aren't perfect—the gesture of the artist stamping a block in a particular way will never be repeated. In the end, DeBellevue comments on the irreducibility of gesture and, by extension perhaps, of artists. There is, after all, only one Lucky DeBellevue.

Collaboration/Exchange *Through April 12, Wednesday-Sunday, 6-11 p.m. P3Studio at the Cosmopolitan, 702-698-7000.*

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