



You Can't Make Art by Making Art: Artists Reflect on the Legacy of David Ireland

GROUP SHOW

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CHANDRA CERRITO CONTEMPORARY

by Renny Pritikin

Unlike the fate for most of us, David Ireland has a community still cogitating about him and his work thirty months after his death. Not known particularly as a teacher—too independent, too ornery—apparently he taught enough to have an outsized influence on quite a few artists, at least as evidenced by this exhibition. Ten artists contribute pieces to the show; these include new works made for the exhibition as well as works made in the past that reflect Ireland's influence. In their often-moving narratives, included as wall text, most attribute taking a workshop or seminar with Ireland as a career-changing if not life-changing experience. The title of the show, *You Can't Make Art by Making Art*, is, in fact, the title of a 1980 Ireland exhibition that has proven to be a long-recalled pedagogical aphorism.

Ireland amalgamated several artistic approaches popular during his career. He had the pencil-behind-the-ear, artist-as-builder approach I associate with other Bay Area artists of the '70s and '80s, such as Jim Pomeroy and Jock Reynolds. He had the Fluxus ethos of utilizing the most modest materials available in a deadpan way. He had the Davis Funk (William Wiley and Robert Arneson) hostility to pretension and art with a capital A, and a love of puns and humor. He embraced the conceptual underpinning in emphasizing process, and the self-assignment of tasks as art.

In tribute albums, musicians either faithfully reproduce the sound of the honored artist or renounce any such ambition and instead try to make the original song their own, which makes for a subtler kind of memorial. Most of the artists in this show make sincere imitation Irelands as memorials, while a few embody his spirit in their own work as monuments. Sheila Ghidini executes a terrific example of the former strategy with *Chair of Heightened Perception* (2011), a simple piece, in which she cuts the legs off a green chair and mounts the upper half with the seat and back at eye height, while leaving the feet on the floor. It is a simple and apt memorial to Ireland's love of chairs and found furniture, as well as the making of small changes to create articulate elisions, as the space between the two severed parts becomes cluttered with invisible suggestion. Randy Colosky, pays homage with



Randy Colosky. *Cinderblock with Great Stuff Expansion Foam*, 2010; bronze and plastic foam. Courtesy of the Artist and Chandra Cerrito Contemporary, Oakland. Photo: Dasha Matsuura.



Mie Preckler. *500 Cap'sTreat*, 1983-5; chair and Irish-tweed caps. Courtesy of the Artist and Chandra Cerrito Contemporary, Oakland.
Photo: Dasha Matsuura.

Cinderblock with Great Stuff Expansion Foam (2010), a bronze cinderblock stuffed éclair-like with yellow plastic foam in Ireland's signature altered-construction-material, dumb-object style. "Dumb" was a key word for Ireland: it connotes modest silence, as in "shut up about the explanations"; it confesses to intentional meaninglessness; and it revels in pure visual pleasure.

Mie Preckler shows a charming work titled *500 Cap'sTreat* (1983-5), which puns on Ireland's masterpiece, his home at 500 Capp Street in San Francisco, and consists of caps made from Irish tweed that was purchased in western Ireland. Six are on view on the wall above another simple green wooden chair on the floor. Mari Andrews neatly ensconces steel wool into two wooden containers—the essential surreal object—flanking a ball of steel wool on a shelf—the essential Ireland object. Sabine Reckewell presents a small cardboard box that contains string and nails that in a past life were the elements of a room-sized installation à la Patrick Ireland, ironically. Jordan Biren offers a boxed photo collection of prints of everyday objects that evoke Ireland's touch without ever directly quoting him.

The consummate usurpation of the Ireland style is a clever Ray Beldner project. The gallery is on a side street that is the center of Oakland's lively first Friday celebration, Art Murmur, where hundreds of young people gather monthly in the name of art. Beldner replaced a square of concrete sidewalk in front of the gallery with his own concrete section with Ireland's name and years impressed in it. This is an oddly moving semi-permanent monument to Ireland: half a perfect Ireland knock-off, half a brass star in a grimy Oakland equivalent of Hollywood's Walk of Fame.