

...might be good

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Brad Tucker: Opportunity Knocks **Art Palace, Austin**

On view through February 16, 2008

by Josh Rios



Brad Tucker, *Tangent*, 2007 Acrylic and enamel on wood 27 x 26 x 3 inches

Opportunity Knocks, Brad Tucker's solo exhibition at Art Palace, suggests that a carefully placed joke explains more about the nature of reality than a seemingly objective fact. Tucker's show consists of two ambitious language-based projects—a three-channel video installation and an in-progress linoleum print book—as well as a series of wooden sculptural objects. His colorful sculptures, works like *Get Around Town* (2007), a piece that resembles an upside-down bicycle, set a playful tone in the gallery. The two language-based projects that constitute the majority of the exhibition employ a similar playfulness. Through wordplay—a comedic embrace of the literal—Tucker's video installation and in-progress book subvert the ways that language creates meaning.

Tucker's three-channel video installation, *The Secret of Life and Death* (2007), features videos of Tucker singing a text written by artist Allen Ruppersberg for an exhibition catalogue. The videos are installed within a hodgepodge arrangement of popish, thrift store, minimalist paintings that create a screen-like false wall. Beyond the screen, a tangle of DVD players, wires and coaxial adapters is visible. Tucker cordons off this mess of

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equipment behind a sculpture of an expanding gate. “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain,” he seems to say, a statement which ultimately draws our attention towards the jumble behind the screen.

When the three videos of *The Secret of Life and Death* play together, each of the multiple Tuckers completes one portion of a string of statements or sentences. The videos evoke the confusing feeling of talking into a cell phone while it's producing an echo. In a strategy akin to the projections of *Tracy + the Plastics*, Tucker occasionally appears behind himself in the videos playing various instruments. Somehow, the various Tuckers manage to cooperate and produce a sincere but clumsy song. The work is also reminiscent of John Baldessari's *Sings Sol LeWitt* (1972), a video in which Baldessari sings statements about conceptual art by Sol LeWitt. Like Baldessari, Tucker sings the words of another artist—off kilter; like Baldessari's, Tucker's manner is simultaneously respectful and skeptical. Dry, awkward truthfulness characterizes the videos by both artists.

As part of his other large-scale project at Art Palace, *Try All* (2007), Tucker has set up one of the galleries as a drying room for linoleum prints that will become part of a book. The prints hang like laundry on a wire while various sculptures of tools are scattered around the room, each exhibiting just enough of Tucker's Oldenburg-like shift to peak interest. *Try All* exemplifies Tucker's interest in wordplay. Each page is made up of a group of drawn images. When “read” in combination, each series of images produces a word or phrase used in the practice of law. For example, the title, *Try All*, sounds like trial. Tucker uses this exchange between images and words to manipulate language for the sake of confusion and humor. The pages of *Try All*, like the rest of the exhibition, are as charming to look at as they are to think about.

Josh Rios is a working artist, student of art history and co-founder of Okay Mountain gallery.

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