

rachel uffner



Review: "Free Soil"

This group show celebrates independent vision.

By Anne Doran

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This unexpectedly coherent group show, titled somewhat mysteriously after America's short-lived Free-Soil Party of 1848–54, brings together seven artists who at first blush seem to have little in common. Collectively, however, they embody Canada's house blend of understated Conceptualism, makeshift formalism and eccentric imagism.

A unifying motif is the juxtaposition of organic and architectonic forms. Jeff Davis's delicate watercolors feature blobby, brightly colored naked men, skulls and clouds arranged in stacked formations. Anya Kielar's disarticulated nudes, conjured from white-painted wood, rope and fabric, are suspended in wood-framed casements the size of windows and doors. Aidas Bareikis's edifice of trashed consumer goods—including, among other things, a broken chair, a couple of cut-up handbags, a ripped shawl and a melted plastic bowl—is more abstract than the tableaux of disintegrating figures he has made in the past. It nevertheless seems haunted by those grotesques, as if they had merely been subsumed, along with their accoutrements, into this

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structure. Adhering to a certain logical progression, but no less eccentric, are Robin Peck's lumpy constructions made from plaster-covered cardboard boxes, which run in a ragged line across the floor of the gallery.

Like any third party worth its salt, Canada has challenged entrenched dichotomies over the past ten years. If the emphasis here on the narrative possibilities of abstraction and the formal potential of even the goofiest figurative painting seems old hat by now, that's partly due to the reliably independent vision of this gallery's artist proprietors.