

'eBay Art Project' at Works/San Jose

The artists who participated in Michael Rosenthal's *eBay Art Project* are mostly his friends, although some of them weren't feeling too friendly when he assigned them their respective pieces of schlock art. Rosenthal purchased the schlock works on eBay.com for less than five dollars each and redistributed them to the various artists (most of whom live and work in the San Francisco Bay Area) with directions to revise, remake or otherwise alter them. In the gallery, each new work appears next to a reproduction of the corresponding original.

Some chose to obliterate their pieces. The collective NDFTBK actually made the ceremonial killing of their three assigned artworks the subject of their new work: On monitors we watch them set fire to one in a public park, bury another in a casket, and drown the last in the Bay. Other artists embrace the ugliness. Chris Eckert turned his piece, originally titled *Quaint Village Clouds*, into *Bad Painting* by cutting out the cloud and sky elements and gluing them onto a rotating glass disk with a fine art-esque spotlight attached above. As the clouds turn in and out of view, enjoying their brief moments of artificial sunlight, the effect is ironically beautiful—deliberately tasteless and yet captivating in a way that the original never was.

Connie Harris also embraces the badness, adorning her three paintings with ornate tapestry tassels and applying her signature glitter. Once tritely impressionistic, they are now postmodern amalgamations of Harris's many influences. They are unmistakably hers, yet they are all about other kinds of people—specifically those who buy “sofa art” to suit their other furniture, adorning their lives with embellishments that express less than nothing about who they are—and the fear of turning into one of those people.

Dickson Schneider and Packard Jennings contribute DVDs, both humorous and expertly executed, and both about the deconstruction of bad artwork, though they go about it from dramatically different angles. Schneider records himself sitting in an armchair, interviewing his painting. He asks his questions, perhaps oblivious to the painting's nonresponse, perhaps not; the point is the way he forces us to contemplate art that we would otherwise casually dismiss. Schneider does not alter the canvas, but our relationship with it is profoundly

changed. Before our eyes it becomes a movie star—something to love and preserve, like a famous face made immobile but ageless and forever beautiful with Botox injections.

Jennings's highly professional DVD takes the format of an extended daytime commercial: the kind you see for all-purpose stain removers or vegetable choppers. He has cut up his bad artworks into small squares, mixed them with glue, and poured them into jars that he hawks as affordable art for regular people. His actors gleefully fling globs of product onto office walls, sports equipment and much, much more (!), expressing satisfaction at its all-purpose-ness in the much the same way that the original intended buyers of the schlock art might have. As in Harris's work, the point is partly about the people who buy this stuff, but here it is also about the slickness of Jennings's own creation: the seeming ease with which he can rip off an art form (if you can call it that) that we usually consider the domain of corporations, not serious artists.

Rosenthal complements the *eBay Art Project* with the *Mona Lisa Postcard Project* in the foyer. He distributed one thousand free postcards printed with Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, asking the recipi-

ents to alter them and send them back. Arranged in a grid, the *Mona Lisas* are fabulous and dramatic: the western world's most recognizable and iconic face made weird and different, hundreds of times over.

Artweek, November 2005

—Lindsey Westbrook

The *eBay Art Project* closed in September at Works/San Jose.

Lindsey Westbrook is a contributing writer to *Artweek*.

Top left: Copy of original painting Bob Ross *Landscape Stream River*; right: Marta Thoma, *Small Dress*, mixed media; bottom left: copy of original painting Gustav Klimt *Modern Tree*; right: Katina Huston, *Double Delight*, oil on canvas, at Works/San Jose.

