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Why Can't Minimal, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery Exhibition Review

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September 25, 2014

Why Can't Minimal, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Sept 2 – Oct 19, 2014

Curated by John G. Hampton

John G. Hampton's exhibition, *Why Can't Minimal*, addresses 'serious' minimalist conventions through varying degrees of parody, humanity and absurdity. In the exhibition's flyer Hampton explains his interest in addressing the humorous side of minimalist art: by banishing its serious and solemn contemplation and embracing its absurdity. An exhibition goal of putting a smirk on the viewer's face through abstract humour is achieved. Robert Garnett suggests that this form of humour might not get viewers laughing out loud, but allows the audience to process, assimilate through intellectual investigation and 'get' the underlying joke.

Depending on their prior knowledge of minimalist art, some references may go over the viewer's head, even with didactics. However, I believe that the majority of these pieces can stand on their own with the explanation included in their didactic labels. Liza Eurich's *Not Quite There*, and Jon Sasaki's *A Minimalist Cube Shipped with Minimal Effort and Expense* are examples of works that, upon engaging with, the viewer can grasp their concept and parody easily. As a fan of minimalist and concept art, I initially found this exhibition amusing and playful. Although I did not recognize every reference that the artworks played off, I could understand their concept and humour based off of the exhibit's

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curatorial statement. Didactic panels offered a brief but clear description for each piece that was also helpful. Tammi Campbell's *Pre Post-Painterly (After Stella)* was a stand out piece, a clear play on Frank Stella's painting-as-object works from the late 1950's. Stella's monumental pinstriped minimalist paintings are monumentally ominous and attempt to remove the painter's indexical trace. Campbell's *Pre Post-Painterly* consists of a series of interlocking panels mimicking Stella's irregular polygon canvases. Instead of painting uniform stripes like Stella's works, Campbell paints adhesive tape onto the surface, the same way Stella would place it onto the canvas to create the 'non-painterly' pin stripes on his canvases. Upon entering the gallery, I was drawn to Campbell's work because it was immediately recognizable and humorous. I was able to realize the concept of the show instantly with this singular piece.

Why Can't Minimal is a fresh, humorous exhibition that focuses on 'parody, complicity, criticality and humanization.' The indexical trace of the artist, of the creation of the work or of the contemporary world is reintroduced into these displayed pieces. These works have a "one-liner" quality however, and I quickly became indifferent and bored with the exhibition. Unquestionably, art critique is important, but I found that the majority of the works displayed were almost cliché, basically mocking, criticizing or poking fun at minimalist art. I would have preferred to see a progressive work that looked beyond minimalism, or reintroduced it into today's society with much less focus on sarcasm. The exhibition is successful at delivering abstract humour to the viewer, however, I generally felt underwhelmed upon leaving. Overall, the exhibition provided a unique and provocative perspective on minimalist art, but that I eventually found repetitive and elementary.



Tammi Campbell's *Pre-Post Painterly (After Stella)*

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