

CW ROELLE: NOT ONLY WOMEN IN WHITE DRESSES

AS220 Project Space • 93 Mathewson Street • Providence, Rhode Island

July 8 through 27

Arguably one of the most prolific and talented draftsmen in Providence, CW Roelle sports a callus in the center of his palm the size of a quarter. With a fluid facility for depicting everyday objects and structures through a patient, continuous line, Roelle deftly interweaves the mundane with invented characters and complex environments using only dark annealed steel wire and a pair of sturdy pliers. The callus is a hazard of the trade.



“I was doing a lot of pencil line drawings, and I wanted to reach in, grab that line and just bend it with my hands — I figured the best way to bend line with my hands was with wire.”

Roelle draws in space, forgoing paper and pencil for a system of twists, hooks and the occasional change of gauge to achieve dazzling effects of depth and shade. Defending the claim that he is “not a sculptor,” Roelle realizes his work wherever possible without the solid crutch of welding, with the exception of the most structurally spare foundations required to support his larger scale pieces.

Never referencing sketches, Roelle turns to photographs and live models as his primary source materials, combining elements from several originals to create one figure. The pleats and folds of clothing, interior environments complete with décor, and embellished frames to contain each composition are delicately rendered. Facial expressions in his figurative work remain ambiguous.

“Wire dulls expression,” explained Roelle, whose go-to inspiration book is a well-thumbed vintage volume titled “A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen.” In addition to the rich period costumes and interiors of silent film, Roelle appreciates that facial expressions “are so much better...so much sharper” in the still frames documenting this groundbreaking medium.

For “Not Only Women in White Dresses” at the AS220 ProjectSpace, Roelle presents work that reinterprets the built-in decorative frames that define the boundaries of most of his earlier wall-hung wire sculptures.

“I had a teacher in college who would always say ‘there are no lines in nature, only edges.’ I am starting to consider that more as I design new pieces...looking for unbroken edges that can contain the scene I want to show.”

Considering Roelle’s consistently “black on white wall” palette, this departure is visually refreshing, and structurally ambiguous in a way that (by design) his rectangular framed wire drawings can’t be. In “How to Read the Paper,” a lounging man does just that, his patio chair sunk into a low relief lawn. The lawn itself could be a shag carpet. Occupying a shallow depth of field, it clings to the mute wall like an amoeba. The composition keeps a poker face — visual cues are just spare enough to make the viewer question if it’s an interior or exterior scene that’s presented.

“Dead Pelican” is the most dimensional and extreme of the wall-hung works. Constructed like a scone, ornamental wings attach the piece to the wall. Dangling below, a realistically dimensional Victorian birdcage cradles, but does not enclose, the limp and utterly flattened form of a dead pelican. Despite the baffling narratives this grotesque play of scale and dimension might suggest, Roelle insists the composition is purely aesthetic. In fact, with the exception of commissioned work, he approaches each piece purely from a visual standpoint, emphasizing that for him, it comes from a place devoid of narrative. The viewer may disagree, but that is the entry point to Roelle’s fantastic and un-flat land.

A selection of Roelle’s work can also be seen throughout the month of August at the Store @ DeCordova Museum and Sculptural Park, where he’ll be the “Artist of the Month.”

Meredith Cutler

ABOVE: *How To Enjoy The Paper*, 2009, painted steel wire.
BELOW: *Dead Pelican*, 2008, painted steel wire.

