

TRIPLE THREAT

ArtSpot closes with a smart, elegant show featuring three emerging artists | BY FELICIA FEASTER

"DIE YOUNG, STAY PRETTY," Debbie Harry crooned. And ArtSpot is taking that command to heart. Closing after only two years in business, ArtSpot is leaving a beautiful corpse in its wake in the form of curator Joey Orr's *Triple Point* show. This exhibition of three emerging Atlanta artists —

Brian Holcombe, Drew Conrad and Victoria Martin-Gilly — is one of the headiest, more elegant shows to alight at the alternative space.

Saltworks Gallery owner and artist Brian Holcombe gets things going downstairs with a scant two sculptures that pack a powerful punch.

The two sofa-sized minimalist objects Holcombe has placed in the center of the

VISUAL ARTS

room suggest Donald Judd crossed with the Auto Zone. Holcombe has covered what look like two giant tuning forks, one laid flat, the other turned sideways, in the kind of nubby, gray industrial carpeting found in car interiors. Each sculpture also has embedded in its surface speakers and a radio, complete with a tuner, which gallery-goers can adjust. A low, menacing hum emanates from each. The insistent white noise immediately brings to mind the experience of pulling up next to a stereo-cranked car emitting a woofered-out bass line through its metal husk.

But the work has deeper resonance, too, as a kind of ironic commentary on the pulsating grandeur of great sculptural works by minimalists like Judd or Richard Serra, who often fill a gallery or museum with a presence so profound, they practically vibrate with authority and importance.

Curator Orr may not have had a clear-cut theme in mind when he put these three *Triple Point* artists together, but each deals with sub-

liminal effects in radically different ways. In Holcombe's case, he exceeds the boundaries of sculpture by embracing sound, which speaks to the body on a completely different level. In Drew Conrad's case, the artist provides a sage critique of the subliminal combination of visuals, body language, clothing and text that define advertising's lexicon of cool.

Lining one L-shaped gallery wall, Conrad's wonderfully dense works on paper suggest ads plastered on city walls. Silhouettes of slouching, defiant young hipsters decorate Conrad's posters, though just what they are selling remains a mystery. Text layered on top or next to the images provides a subtle indictment of fashion's insidious inducements: "Mass Appeal." "Nobody." "Empty." "Casanova." "Fashionista." "Hipster." The shoulders slumped, downward gazing pose of a silhouetted figure, which looks so captivatingly aloof in one image, transforms when Conrad places a word like "Ugly" next to it, making that same posture suddenly look shamed and hurt. Being hip is not, as the Calvin Klein ads promise, a liberating stance.

In Conrad's covertly disturbing work, the artist challenges the detachment that advertising glorifies — a cool, distant sexiness that in Conrad's hands becomes creepy and soulless, like Warhol in a very dark mood. And like the insidious hum of Holcombe's

sculpture, Conrad's advertisements for alienation become their own kind of subliminal message painted in a low-key white or bone-on-white color scheme that emphasizes how much can be said with minimal means.

If Conrad's works mimic the cold, detached imagery of advertising, the antithesis is Victoria Martin-Gilly's paintings on paper, which are filled with fervid, obsessive gestures. From a distance, Martin-Gilly's works, created on pleasing primary backgrounds of blue, red and green, look like a document or religious text written in Hebrew or Arabic. Rows and rows of marks made in dark blues, reds and greens read like words filling every square inch of the paper. It's only on closer inspection that one realizes the elaborate marks are actually a bizarrely primitive binary code: an alteration of vertical and horizontal marks repeated endlessly to form a pattern as dense and detailed as the weavings in a rug.

Martin-Gilly's obsessive paintings suggest religious and spiritual endeavors. She makes that religious parallel even more apparent in a small room she's fashioned into a kind of shrine. Painted white from floor to ceiling, the installation features eight small paintings created directly on the wall and one displayed, like a religious text, on a white pedestal in the center of the room. Martin-Gilly has also hung three small crystals from the ceiling, which cast a variety of shadows against the wall much in the way a stained-glass window or the onion domes and soaring minarets on a mosque use ornament for spiritual ends. As in her paintings, Martin-Gilly again blurs the line between a place of worship and a gallery, finding a similar vernacular of contemplation and human labor that attempts to harness the divine.

As with Conrad and Holcombe's work, Martin-Gilly's paintings and installation are delightfully understated but rich in ideas. All three artists in *Triple Point* speak softly but carry a big intellectual stick.



Tuning Forks installation by Brian Holcombe