

**biochrome**

Semmes Gallery

University of the Incarnate Word

4301 Broadway

San Antonio, 78209

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Organized by former ArtPace resident Chris Sauter, "biochrome" brought together four of the more subversively playful artists at work in the region. Schizoid, fun, even edible, the colorful array of small work was placed low on gallery walls or directly on the floor in easy reach of little hands. The hip, synthesized title suggests a group

preoccupation with biotechnology, but any new mutant strains were spliced with nostalgia for materials and aesthetics of decades past.

Tinted in pastel shades of yellow, pink, and green, Michele Monseau's plaster-dipped bubble-wrap objects have a forced cheeriness that humorously covers for their lack of distinct form. Resembling large wads of chewed gum or lesser organs cut from the body, these passive-aggressive objects are so indistinct and limp they resist being at all. This suggestion of the unconscious, matched with punning titles like *Dream Boat* and *Mt. Hump*, lend the objects a perverse charm. Like the recalcitrant teenager forced to dress nice for the grandparents, Monseau's objects are unruly beneath their normative, candy-coated shells.

Margaret Craig's brightly colored, confectionery pieces give off the aroma of butter, vanilla, and kitchen alchemy. Made from pressed sugar, royal icing, and

water, her fragile, bone-dry art is a beautiful but unstable mix of contrasting properties. A group of crystalline sugar cones were eroded with water, leaving jagged holes that reveal their contents: red pepper corns in a blue cone, a blue marble in a yellow one. Three trivet-like tiles, hung to suggest Abstract Expressionist paintings, further accentuate the sugar's material possibilities. Beneath a marble-smooth finish, dense bands of high-color icing wind through delicately mottled patches of sparkling sugar. The viewer's sense that water and a little force would dissolve everything lends Craig's work an intensity which extends beyond the nostalgia and irony of its components.

Kate Terrell makes bio-incursions into the most synthetic of contexts. Her vinyl projects start out ordinary, as seat cushions or padded headboards, and end up lush, carefully sewn fantasies of unchecked growth. Pink vinyl bunny ears

sprout in an upper corner of a hanging piece called *Scamp*. Across its gray vinyl surface plays a complicated and clashing passage of painted leaves, tiny pompoms, dots of puff-paint, and scattered tufts of gold thread. Every element is chosen to defy a boundary, be it material good taste, matching colors, or the manufactured edge of the object. In other works, more fully developed vinyl appendages, such as abstracted feet and fish heads, burst from surfaces tightly worked with craft-store decorations.

Justin Kidd's knitted works are the kind of snugly, weird forms children adore, until their nonrepresentational quality turns creepy. Never mind: Kidd's sculpture negates the need for certain psychological safety zones, eliding natural and synthetic, self and other. Sealed in store-bought and homemade plastic bags, some of the pieces suggest a gestating organism or the inner workings of a plant cell. Other, afghan-styled objects have strangely placed appendages which may or may not be human, which may or may not be Snoopy. With titles like *Untitled #48 or some shit*, Kidd brings to mind the master of abjection, Mike Kelley. In an essay accompanying Kelley's 1988 Renaissance Society exhibition, Howard Singerman noted the artist's affinity for "the stuff of living rooms and bedrooms and nurseries we would all like to forget, of obligatory visits and unappreciated mementos." With good humor and exquisite craft, "biochrome" furthered the messy reclamation of these elements.

*John Ewing is a writer living in San Antonio.*

**Justin Kidd**

*confectioner's kiss*, 2000, from "biochrome." Knitted yarn, plastic bag, dimensions variable. Photo by the artist, courtesy of Semmes Gallery.

