

Arts Vibe

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VISUAL ARTS

B-boys play with fire

Bold and beautiful. Bright and boundless. Bennett and Brandt. At **Finesilver Gallery**, these two rising Texas artists seduce even the most jaded eye with a stunning double blow to the optic nerve. From Dallas, **Andrew Bennett's** soot-on-gesso "paintings" recorded fire and smoke with delicate precision for Finesilver's inaugural exhibition in 1998. This time around, Bennett draws the viewer closer to the heat. *While My Neighbor Sleeps* is a haunting video which took more than seven months and 2,000 candles to stage. Luminescent and strange, the short program focuses on tight rows of white birthday candles that slowly collapse in smooth, random patterns.

Bennett's trick is to edit out the careful pouring of melted wax that creates the mesmerizing effect. The viewer sees only the candles toppling like toy soldiers to an eerie, nighttime soundtrack of electrical hums, barking dogs, and noise from a baseball field. In the gallery, the candles-on-gesso panel used to create the video joins five others in neon colors. Elaborately swirled, the masses of candles with their short wick caps suggest passionate group rituals viewed from a distance.

Upstairs, Houstonite **Todd Brandt** places vivid paint in ingenious containers to keep the eyes guessing. *Gardenwatcher* is a gorgeous optical illusion enacted with a Klimt-like affinity for contrasting colors. The large wall piece arranges hundreds of coffee creamer cups filled with latex paint (11 gallons for this one work) into bright, diagonal patterns that appear to swell and ripple as the viewer moves. *Bird* does even more with empty, plastic tubing. Other works are created with paint-coated plastic tubes mounted on the gallery walls in long rows. Move back and forth in front of these op-art wonders and you're treated to the sensation of a floating, ever-shifting field of color, shadow, and shape. When Brandt showed his roomful of creamer cups on an elevated floor at **Sala Diaz** in March, the rich, playful mix of material and color tempted each visitor, like the stray cat that slipped into the gallery and made the piece her personal toy. Don't miss having your own encounter with these optical treats.

— John Ewing
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