

# The Layers Club

Five Artists Achieve Strong, Various Works In Process-Oriented Show

by Deborah McLeod

Laminae | At Goucher College's Rosenberg Gallery through Dec. 15



BILLOW TALK: detail of Allie Rex's installation.

THE TITLE OF GOUCHER COLLEGE'S CURRENT EXHIBITION, *Laminae*, suggests processes--and this sensual and investigational show is especially an artists' one for that reason. Most of the materials called into use by its five participants are of common origin, personal stuff found around the house or garage that is animated through obsessive construction. The works demonstrate a repetitive formal organization--of layering a thing upon a thing, i.e., lamination--to aspire to a greater measure of cool integrity, but not to the idea of permanence.

Allie Rex is the exception to this visual coolness, as her ecstatic, explosive paper cutouts of "Where Does It Come From and Where Does It Go" erupt from flat sources to become a large 3-D mural. Rex's little forms begin as comic clouds--the exhaust from an old jalopy, dynamite blasts, or conversation bubbles. In brightly destroyed colors they overlap one another to establish a bumpy chaotic depth. Lower and further cutouts grow more arterial or cellular, the way leaves lace as larvae nibble away their tender parts. Fresh, intact forms hover confidently above the orgy of decomposition, set on pins of various lengths, slightly curled and succumbing to gravity and the room's ambient humidity.

Across from Rex, Allison Fomich's party-favored green "Bortyesicles" are latex balloons made even more luminous by their placement on light tables. Knotted together as though they once formed a fantastical carnival creature, they relentlessly forfeit a little more happy bulbous innocence over time, infinitesimally deflating into a sort of profane and lecherous object with each passing minute.

The painstakingly folded and architecturally stacked works of Derick Melander form ramparts, coliseums, and rubble in a separate alcove of the exhibition. Melander's accompanying preparatory drawings suggest plans for structures made of stone and logs. But when his plans are fleshed out, they are tenderly, interdependently built instead from cast-off clothing. For Melander, these building components are amassed surrogates for society. Each article of clothing, once having protected somebody from the weather, also serves as an identity signifier.

You can't avoid considering the concentration that went into folding each garment into the perfectly regimented shape as Melander has. It recalls the frustrations of unfolding a sweater in a department store

display and trying to get it adequately back together.

During military funerals and Japanese tea ceremonies the ritual folding of cloth is almost a martial art, a highly conscious act of order that acknowledges dignity and respect of others. Although this lofty concept may break down some in Melander's coliseum piece made principally of tiny Barbie clothes, it returns in sharp contrast in his corner installation. Various clothes heaped into a pile invite you to have a seat. This piece transforms the discarded articles into something sort of gross and off-putting. Should you accept the invitation, there you are, too--part of the messy, multihued, unwashed fray of humanity. This interactive involvement is most succinctly realized in Melander's garment stacks "Grasp 2." Its twin-tower construction involves a few arms and sashes reaching across the void to the other stack.

As Melander builds complexity and identity out of patterned fabrics through his laminated selections, Liz Ensz takes pattern to another architectural place. Moorish and Persian design motifs from filigreed panels and textiles are reformulated to compose an elaborate wallpapered environment. Into the ornate motifs, originally intended to convey the elaborate veiled mystery of the divine, Ensz inconspicuously interjects such graven images of capitalist theism as gas pumps. Her installation is unequivocally stunning and monumental, indicative of rigorous effort, but its message feels too singular and previously settled, turning this remarkably beautiful effort into a simple pun.

The leaning totems of Annie Farrar add a dark specter and ballast to this otherwise vivid show. In the implied sequence of the works--because there is that sense of time's passage in *Laminae*--Farrar's three objects precede the other works through evanescence into ultimate decay: Roxanne, Sheena and Eva are their goddess names. "Eva" must surely be Eva Hesse, as these sculptures pay homage to the ill-fated materials artist who started it all. Farrar's totemic structures feel like they've been exhumed from years at the bottom of a lake, their additive organic muck collaborating with the imagination to gnaw away at their long-withstanding bones.