



Art Reviews

Crispin Webb & Jason Andrew Bowles

Mahan Gallery
Through March 3

Among other accomplishments, the two Mount Vernon artists sharing Mahan Gallery in February can take credit for the month's most aromatic show. On the walls, Crispin Webb incorporates melted candle wax mixed with honey and spices into Fluxus-inspired interactive sculpture; and on small wooden palettes on the floor, Jason Andrew Bowles' paper and metal sculpture emits an aura, and odor, of decay. The effect isn't unpleasant, though, instead evoking the scent of a walk through a damp forest in the fall.

Like the movement that moves the artist, Webb's work actively avoids standard guidelines of aesthetic beauty and containment into one format. Made of found objects, scrap wood and circuitry picked up in thrift stores and trash piles, their shape recalls backwoods, whitewashed mailboxes, as if nodding to Fluxus' mail art contingent. Although text does figure in, through the artist's name and words like "quality" and "white object" rubber-stamped into the wax while it's still hot, the pieces hold experiences instead of letters.

Following the instructions to "push," the viewer is rewarded with recorded sound, moving parts and, in the case of *Smell Box*, a wave of sweet-smelling air from a wax-encrusted hair dryer. By interacting with the works to get their motors running, the viewer transforms each sculpture into a performance piece that is forever a work in progress, as long as there's someone around to push the button.

In an artist's statement, Bowles describes his work as "examples of unforced natural processes of age, color and texture." It takes the form of dense, blocky combinations of rusted metal and recycled paper that's been moistened and mashed down to a near pulp. Their shape implies past contact with a trash compacter, but time has done its work, as it does on all of us. The pieces are like Dorian Gray portraits of society's paper trail, all bumpy, blackened and sideways-leaning. Though the decomposition process has removed all perfection from the shape, it gives each work its own unique, continuing life cycle, touched by the shifting color palette of mold, rust and age.

For info, call 294-3278. —Melissa Starker.