

A series of wry inside jokes instantiated via improbable materials and processes, Andrew Sexton's recent solo debut was built around what at first seemed a similarly unlikely organizing principle: His drawings and multimedia conglomerations were devised as "portraits" of friends and family members. Although its symbolic vocabulary occasionally suggested a familiar brand of neo-Gothic kitsch, Sexton's bricolage nevertheless managed to avoid the self-conscious seriousness that often plagues work in the idiom, forgoing moody introspection for genuine exuberance. And the artist was comfortable enough to occasionally play things for laughs as well—the individual essays, like the show in general, mostly pulled off the difficult trick of being simultaneously funny-strange and funny-ha ha.

Sexton, a 2005 Yale MFA grad, often taps former classmates as subjects. *Adrian Wong*, 2006, one of two slightly anomalous works on paper, apparently celebrates a fellow sculptor through a dense cartoonish drawing in ink and soy sauce on rice paper. Meanwhile *The Yellow Rose of Texas*, 2006—a huge construction of painted aluminum suggesting a map of the Lone Star state, coated with ochre flocking and pimped out with electric blue fiber optics and LEDs—was emblazoned with the word *ROSSON* (undoubtedly for the Dallas-born painter *Rosson Crow*) in an especially juicy '70s "Price Is Right"-style font.

For a certain demographic, the subjects of and references in Sexton's "portraits" may ring some bells; for those outside looking in, they're intriguing (if abstruse) vehicles for a risk-taking mode of assemblage that endows unlikely collections of objects with narrative resonance. *Louis Hopper*, 2006, for instance—probably the only work of art in history to involve a skateboard, a cobra-head beer tap, and a skull made of aged Cheddar cheese—vividly captures a funky burnout milieu, right down to its black Spinal Tap-style wall-painting backdrop and the mingling aromas of stale ale and party food left too long on a kitchen counter.

Sexton's persistent courting of strange adjacencies was also on show in *The Michael Stickrod Experience*, 2005, a bewildering conglomeration whose materials ran to steel, glass, wood, aluminum, foam, leather, tequila, car doors, and paint, not to mention a "custom Michael Stickrod Experience T-shirt," a Discman playing Hall and Oates's "Private Eyes," and a massage. Though the backcrubs had long since ended by the time I saw the show (the therapist was apparently an interactive component conceived primarily for the opening), the booze and the tunes continued to occupy a little shelf enfolded within a pair of car doors, each adorned with one half of a painted butterfly emblem—a junkyard reliquary that somehow manages something approaching delicacy in its mock-serious representation of its subject.

Like any good mad scientist, Sexton also performed his experiment on himself, and his own *Self-Portrait*, 2006—made of steel, rubber tubing, and propane—was entirely in character. As I paused near it on my way out, the artist himself stepped from behind the counter and offered to "get it going." Wandering over to a large propane tank, he turned the handle and put a lighter to the bottom of the sculpture, and the thing burst into flame like a stage prop for a heavy metal barbershop quartet. *Self-Portrait* catches the tone of the show just about right—a peculiar and appealing confection of mood, material, and method whose brand of fond hyperbole is just over-the-top enough to charm.

Andrew Sexton, *Saira Manjothi*, Co-Founder of *Pegs*, 2006, bronze, candy, glitter, denim, and band patches, 82 x 62 x 38".



—Jeffrey Kastner