



Hocking and Snider's wall of "Relics" at Artcite. (Photo: Clinton Snider)

Out of the past

Beloved items in boxes make up Windsor installation

by **Vince Carducci**
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While the local media scrambled in the wake of the recent five-alarm fire on Detroit's Piquette Street to identify the industrial complex that burned down, Detroit artist Scott Hocking knew right away it was the old Studebaker plant. He had been in abandoned parts of it just days before foraging for artifacts in preparation for the show now on view at Artcite in Windsor.

Hocking was gathering material for re-creating "Relics," a room-sized installation of industrial and domestic castoffs stacked in open boxes from floor to ceiling around all four walls and on the floor, first shown at a Detroit Institute of Arts exhibition marking the city's tricentennial. Hocking and his collaborator Clint Snider had been selling off pieces ever since the museum changed its mind on acquiring the work, with collectors buying a single box or as many as 25 at a time.

About 60 percent of Hocking's contribution in the Artcite installation is replacement material. The new version runs the height and length of the gallery's far wall, filling more than 200 boxes. And while the slightly funky odor that wafted through the original is missing, the Artcite installation still effectively evokes Detroit as the arrested heartbeat of the modern age. Old work gloves are stuffed into one box; in another, a pegboard holds a set of moldering hand tools. Others contain battered ductwork, rusted exhaust fans, decaying signage, dirt-encrusted housewares, busted toys and the like.

The term "relic" has double meaning with respect to the collaboration. On the one hand, there's the relic as a leftover from the past; the refuse of the Motor City's erstwhile modern culture certainly is that. On the other hand, there's the relic as an object of religious devotion, and indeed there's an aura of the talismanic in the transfiguration of debris by Hocking and Snider into things of artistic veneration.

The epitome of the show is two bricks set in an unfinished box, located in the upper right corner of the wall installation, which was left that way so as not to disturb the gallery's wall-mounted motion detector. One brick was picked up more than a decade ago, unearthed during roadwork in the Cass Corridor. In the center is the name of its manufacturer, "Hocking Block." The other brick, freshly retrieved from the smoking ruins of the Studebaker plant, was found on a return trip after the fire. As if in fulfillment of a vision quest, the

companion is embossed with the name of the brick-maker, "Snider."

The mash-up of modern and romantic in "Relics" links Hocking and Snider to '60s artists like the late Robert Smithson, currently featured at the Whitney Museum in New York City. Besides pioneering earthworks and other avant-garde art practices, Smithson, a Catholic, also painted spiritual subjects and sometimes conflated both tendencies.

Not wanting to merely rehash where they've already been, Hocking and Snider augment "Relics" with newer pieces each of the artists has been doing on his own. Installed in the other half of the gallery, the two bodies of work reveal the artists' different sensibilities.

Hocking has a more formalistic bent. He presents a series of digital photographs enlarged from color slides found in an abandoned building on Canfield that was once probably a processing lab. Severely damaged by exposure to the elements, the images of bland office scenes, church interiors and nature are barely discernible through the deterioration that has taken place over the years. Hocking meticulously adjusted the images in Photoshop to render them as accurately as possible in keeping with the adage "what you see is what you see," even if in this case you really don't.

Snider is more the expressionist. He has dipped household discards in pastel green, blue, rose and beige paints reminiscent of the Martha Stewart Living collection, though the paint actually came from a trash pile. Whereas Hocking focuses on surface effects, Snider seems to want to unlock the meaning of the things embedded deep inside layers of latex pigment. A lone roller skate, a broken rake and a weather-beaten fence post are props in who knows what domestic drama.

Relics and Other Works is especially noteworthy because most galleries fill their summer schedules with odds and ends. This show is major league.

Scott Hocking and Clinton Snider: Relics & Other Works runs through Aug. 13 at Artcite, 109 University Ave. W., Windsor; 519-977-6564.

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