

Inside the Imagined Head of Pete Nelson @ BLANKSPACE

Pete Nelson's recent exhibition at Blankspace Gallery/Oakland titled *ain't no party like a holy ghost party* is an installation for occupying a sculpto-virtual headspace, leftover by the artist in the gallery and open to interpretation on the meaning between boozing it up fountain-style, sound-byte holy-roller shock attack, and close-ups of sexy lips, i.e. yours, mine, his or hers (well, to be determined, I guess...). I'm immediately reminded of the film *Being John Malkovich*...so, have I found myself partaking in the art-vessel of Being Pete Nelson?

Occupying the entire main gallery of Blankspace, Nelson has laid out three objects relating to the senses: a mounted video screen in place of vision, a semi-hidden speaker in a free-standing platform in place of hearing, and a two-part elevated bathtub and moonshine jug-holding second platform that connects to a freestanding mechanized water fountain in place of taste. Smell is left to the imagination, I guess. Well, it's close *enough* to being inside another's head. Furthermore, the multi-sensual experience is controlled: there is a separation of experience where only one sense can be experienced at one time (while drinking, you cannot see the video, as your back is to it, and the audio section of the installation, plays split-seconds after you finish your drink, but plays for barely long enough to realize what is actually heard). This installation doesn't invite to be looked at, it invites participation, and that participation not only activates the work, it also completes the piece...one can't expect a visit from the holy ghost if there ain't willing receivers!

There is a conundrum here. And maybe that momentary puzzle experience *is* the point, as described in the show's statement: "a space where thoughts of faith and addiction can simultaneously exist...two contriving terrains describe a dependency not on the other but rather on the polarity of their existence." So to be puzzled is good, because artwork isn't always "better" by providing answers, like when a puzzle can directly inspire the activity of debating solutions—a dialogue. That being said, what definitely occurs is I get to know a little more about Nelson's subject matter, maybe even some knowledge about the artist's personal struggles (addiction?) and/or exorcised demons (faith?). And, as a reaction to Nelson directly, I think the addiction *to* faith—whether in spiritual ecstasy or earthly vice—is the real terrain being presented within this installation.

-SB, Oakland, April 2007 (Shotgun Review)