

## TOAST + COWBOYS

OFFROAD PRODUCTIONS  
2891-B TRADES WEST ROAD, SANTA FE

### THE WORD “PRISTINE” COMES TO MIND AS I RECALL THE EXHIBITION

I saw at Michael Freed’s pop-up gallery, Offroad Productions, a quarterly event that he hosts at his studio off Siler Road, in Santa Fe’s industrial area—such as it is. Freed’s neighbors include a lot of auto mechanics and auto-body shops, a taxi company, and a couple of caterers. Kitchen Angels has its address there, and you can pick up your recycling bins from the City’s nearby Environmental Services. Hardly the stuff of immaculate elegance.

Freed’s philosophy for Offroad Productions—his mission statement as it were—is all about serving the population of artists in Santa Fe who don’t have representation in town, whose work is neither terribly commercial nor likely to find suitable collectors without a little nudge from those behind-the-scenes, low-level movers and shakers who make things like Offroad function. And function it does, quite well indeed. With previous shows organized by Freed himself and guest-curated by Jennifer Joseph and Zane Fischer, this is an effort by locals for locals, the kind of art scene that operates, of necessity and by choice, under tourism’s radar.

The exhibition that took place on Saturday, April 19 and remained on view by appointment only through the end of the month—*Toast + Cowboys*—was curated by Cyndi Conn, who laid the outlines for a faultless show. Conn is the executive director of the non-profit Creative Santa Fe. Having arrived there through her background as a gallery owner, curator, and scholar, she knows her creative types. Conn co-owned Launch Projects, where she maintained an unimpeachable roster of hip and youngish artists; before that she was the curator at the Center for Contemporary Arts. A stint at EVO Gallery preceded CCA, and I recall her as a shy young thing in the early 2000s, when I met her in SITE Santa Fe’s docent program. Now that the future for creatives in town is, at least in part, in her capable hands, we shouldn’t be surprised to rediscover Conn’s first love: impeccable yet somehow quirky art objects, works on paper in particular. She and I have been known to pounce on a paper piece at an art fair, say, with equal passion and avidity; I freely confess that we share a certain aesthetic for minutely detailed drawings of odd subject matter, and I was not disappointed in this instance.

Curator Conn scored a direct hit with *Toast + Cowboys*, featuring two series of hand-drawn, meticulous works on lovely, toothy, receptive paper. Sam McBride sketched her breakfast bread every day for three hundred and sixty-five days in a row, while Clayton Porter mined his roots as a kid who grew up around horses for the *Cowboy* portion of the show. It was enchanting, as good as or better than anything I’ve seen in most galleries on

Canyon Road, downtown, and in the Railyard. Having maintained for some time now that bad art is prevalent everywhere, in every city, it’s refreshing to find the good stuff in our own backyard, right here in an artists’ community that practices in Santa Fe—whether they show here or not.

McBride’s toasty samples presented a tremendous range in technique and style, despite the limited subject matter. The artist had set a task for herself to draw her *Daily Bread* every day in one sitting. Ninety pieces were exhibited. From charcoal to pencil, black-and-white to faint hues, every slice of bread was luscious in its own way. Some of her illusionist works looked ready to eat, while the more graphical drawings varied from droll to delightful. I could have happily gone home with #332, a heel of wheat bread with hints of pink and yellow that managed to look exactly right. McBride says that her influences include the brilliant Robert Crumb and such pillars of art as *Cracked* and *Mad* magazines. Suitably, her graphical works are executed with quite a fine hand. Overall, the series reveals McBride’s unabashed love for the act of drawing. There was a sense of the joy of

getting it down on paper, and satisfaction in the rigor of her practice.

I have been a fan of Porter’s draftsmanship for some years now, but found myself astonished with the quality of his *Cowboys*. The six framed drawings had great presence, each a two-inch square of pink on large rectangles of untouched paper. The tension between small and large; macho rodeo riders on bucking broncs rendered in the girliest of pink pencil; and the intricate, fully modeled drawings against plain white paper—the material has as punchy an impact as rodeo itself. The dramatic, detailed action of the subject matter contradicted the size and color in which it was presented; execution and concept were flawless. These works are jewels, plain and simple.

Kudos to Conn and Freed for offering such a gift to our community. Readers are advised to pay attention to Offroad Productions. Long may it live to host more exhibitions.

—KATHRYN M DAVIS

Clayton Porter, *Untitled (Bronco 34)*, Prismacolor pencil (Rose PC929) on Arches Palatine paper, 30” x 22”, 2014

