Gallery Visit, Extra Credit, Michael Farmer, ARH101

On November 15th I visited the exhibition entitled ”Blur” at the Mesa Community College Gallery. The structure is a one story glass walled building north of the Arts and Communications building on campus. Having wanted to go to student shows before, I was aware that the glass walls usually allowed a viewer a preview of what is inside. This was not the case with this installation. I poked my head inside one evening and, while the door was open, the space was empty of visitors. I entered unsure of my status. An attendant came from a hallway and greeted me. I asked if the gallery was open. She responded officially they closed at 5 (it was now 5:20) but she would be around for some time and I was welcome.

I was immediately struck by a vibrant red textile work that draped itself across several feet of open space. I then began to peruse the gallery starting clockwise from the wall to my left. The general space struck me as different from other museums in its relatively lower ceilings. This contributed to the general accessibility of the displays, making them seem less monumental but heightened the proximity and tightness of the works displayed.

After passing many works worthy of intense consideration I was drawn to works by the same artist Nick Guttierez, on an unusual substrate, drywall. I settled on the piece titled “Haymaker” created in 2017. It is acrylic paint and ink on drywall. Its detailed and morphing forms emerge from the blank white and textured background bringing into focus a mixture of organic and industrial imagery. From the roots of a Lichtenstein-esque offset dot printing sprouts engine like cylinders which grow into an upside down gothic arch of a cathedral. A coiled suspension spring transforms into a spine with vertebrae and ribs, which in turn flow into line drawings of clouds or industrial pollution from smokestacks.

The piece seems to be an examination of the extremes of interior and exterior spaces, travelling from the skeletal to the atmospheric, and from functional, technical, industrial machine and warehouse architecture to the inversion of the sacredness of the gothic cathedral. The medium contributes to the piece in its detail of line drawn ink like a draughtsman’s blueprint of a religious fever dream of a modern dystopia, writ large on the very material of our everyday homes. This religiosity is pulled out of the piece by being displayed next to another artist’s larger than life portrait of Jesus made of what might be color copies held together with packing tape. This placement brings out the subtly resonant tones of “Haymaker.”

Overall, the exhibition “Blur” can be summed up by eclecticism and ingenuity in representation. The works comprised a wide diversity of mediums, from wood, to metal, to textile, to ceramic, to digital photography/collage, to video, to yes, even drywall. As diverse as the artworks were they shared a conceptual framework that was thought provoking in a way that tied them together while at the same time set them apart from one another.