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## Mirror, Mirror

By Gregory M. Knepp



*In To My Self* continues through Sat., Oct. 21. SPACE, 812 Liberty Ave., Downtown. 412-325-7723

I'm not good at telling jokes, and I heard this one from my seventh-grade history teacher, but here goes:

A father has two sons. One's a complete pessimist, the other an unwavering optimist. To learn whether he can inculcate a more balanced worldview, Dad decides on an experiment. He gives the pessimist a pony, and meanwhile fills the optimist's bedroom with bedding straw and, shall we say, "horse-related leftovers."

The pessimist, far from excited, sulks. "I'll have to feed, water and brush him," he sighs. "It's going to be a lot of work."

Meanwhile, the optimist, overjoyed, digs frantically around his compacted room.

"What are you so happy about?" asks the father.

"Well, Dad, there's got to be a horse in here somewhere!"

The optimist is me; the room is SPACE gallery; the bedding straw is its current show, *In To My Self*.

According to SPACE's Web site, the show is "an exhibition of works that address issues of self-portraiture and humor."

Yet what's more off-putting than narcissism and inside jokes that no one can relate to, Shecky? Start with Eric Fleischauer's "excuses, excuses" (2006). Not to be confused with conceptual art (art sometimes too complex to actually be executed), "excuses" instead depicts the artist in front of a green screen illustrating his litany of reasons why his contribution to the show is only a list of explanations (oversleeping, no crew, etc.) for why none of his better ideas came to fruition. More "my-dog-ate-my-homework" whiny than winsome, it also seems a pissed-away opportunity in a gallery prominent enough that its shows are occasionally reviewed in contemporary-art journals.

Jesse Jamaica McLean's aptly titled "Fleetings" (2006) is a fanciful, approximately 30-second "video illustration." The work depicts a computer-generated congregation of butterflies, one occasionally breaking free from the swarm to "fly" to the foreground, where different filmed scenes are cut-and-pasted to sections of the insect's wings. One frame contains a George Lucas lookalike walking toward the camera; another depicts an arm tossing a bocce ball. Too brief, too vague to distill any inherent value, it suggests a semester-end project culled from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh.

A contribution by Ayanah Moor is straightforwardly disappointing. It shows the artist as she stands before an empty white background, reciting the lyrics to two rap classics, "Baby Got Back" and "I Need Love," directly to the camera. Performed more as "viewer wooing" than as an *a capella* rendition or even a poetic reading, the words *do* ring more sincere without musical accompaniment. Yet one wonders how placing borrowed rap lyrics on video generates any aesthetic import whatsoever.

With its small video monitor situated in a hollow log deposited in a bed of mulch, Shaun Silber's "(Spontaneous) Self-Portrait w/ Slug" (2003) details a slug's sluggish trek across his face. It's more "eww" than "ah," and more a *Jackass* audition than an aesthetic gesture.

The exhibition's redeeming contributions come from the short videos of Wes Kline. Juxtaposing a jogger amidst a strip-mined wasteland, "Mine Skull" is a visual elegy to an ancestor who labored in the mines below the runner's feet. And "Hauntology" (2006) recounts a shutterbug's last hours in a wintry countryside: A mournful voice, speaking in enigmas, narrates, while the photographer eternally walks the land in the guise of a pasty-faced specter.

P.S. I'm still digging ...

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