



What looks like trash is an artists' treasures  
Londoner Susan Collis' exhibit at Lora Reynolds Gallery inspires a wealth  
of appreciation for the art  
By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin

Start with the crumple of gold paper that rests on the floor-level windowsill of Lora Reynolds Gallery.

Seemingly innocuous, it could be mistaken for a fist-sized bit of discarded giftwrap tossed off from the nearby reception desk.

But it's "Came back smiling," one of several new works by London-based artist Susan Collis, and it is made of 24-carat gold leaf.

Collis is getting a second exhibit at Lora Reynolds Gallery, after her delightful 2008 showing, the artist's United States solo debut. And once again, Collis delivers a body of work that cleverly upends expectations.

Yes, there's a certain amount of preciousness in Collis' trompe l'oeil objects — literally and figuratively. The specks and markings on pieces of scrap wood that lean against the wall or are gathered in a corner are actually inlays of black diamonds, amber, silver, opal or mother-of-pearl. And the clusters of screws dotting the gallery wall are made of white gold or platinum, their anchors red carnelian.

With Collis' obsessive-compulsive attention to detail, the quotidian becomes subtly elaborate and literally (economically?) precious.

That could be merely cute if it weren't also a matter of the inherent elegance, thoughtfulness and scrupulous skill in Collis' art-making technique.

Her mastery is more immediately apparent in the compelling graphite drawings on display.

Vigorous abstract marks look as though the artist used a white drawing implement. But in reality, the strong gestural lines are blank, negative space left clean from the dizzingly minuscule hatch marks that Collis has used to make each drawing. And it takes careful, repeated looking to realize the detail of the artist's labor.

Making an apt companion to Collis' exhibit is a new series of graphite drawings in the gallery's project room by Tom Molloy, the Irish artist who has had several exhibits in Austin.

Molloy's is also an obsessive-compulsive kind of art-making of great detail and effort. And for this new series "Woman," Molloy takes eight paintings by Dutch master Johannes Vermeer, rendering each in exquisite gray-and-white particulars yet absent the female subject at the center of Vermeer's original work.

In Molloy's hands there is no woman in "Woman in Blue Reading a Letter." And yet with the setting such a recognizable art historical image (in graphite, Molloy captures Vermeer's luminescent handling of light with aplomb), it's as if we're seeing the moment just before or just after the female in the pale blue smock intently read a missive in the diffuse glow natural light, and thus became the subject of Vermeer's painting.

Like Collis, Molloy invites close, and repeated, art-looking. Or maybe both artists justifiably demand it.