

Austin American Statesman
XL Arts
By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin
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British artist Susan Collis wants you to look - and then look again

At Lora Reynolds' new gallery, the leftover construction materials aren't what they seem

In our virtual world, where ready-made consumer goods arrive instantaneously and seemingly out of nowhere, it's easy to forget the physical work required to actually make most things. And it's also easy to overlook what might give an object its uniqueness.

Susan Collis gets this. And the Edinburgh-born, London-based artist sweetly teases our tendency to overlook in an exhibit at the new and expanded location of Lora Reynolds Gallery. It's Collis' first solo show in the United States.

At first glance, the new gallery looks empty. (Indeed, that's what many casual observers remarked at the opening reception last Saturday.) After three years tucked away on West Avenue, Reynolds has moved her operations into a much more prominent and larger space (about 1,200 square feet) on the ground floor of the newly opened 360 Condominiums.

A sleek wood desk graces the foyer, which in turn leads to the high-ceilinged, white-walled gallery, its floors a polished concrete.

A workman's dark blue painted-splattered coveralls hang on a peg. A push broom stands propped in one corner. Screws stick out of one wall. A worn table with stains looks haphazardly placed, askew in a far corner.

But take a second, closer look at those coveralls, that table and those screws. They're not what they seem.

Those paint splatters on the coveralls are really fine embroidery in delicate thread. The stains on that table? They're an inlay of mother-of-pearl, opal, conch shell and magnecite, expertly installed to look like the rings left by a can of white paint and the accompanying drippings. Those screws are made of white gold, platinum or silver; some are inlaid with tiny bits of diamond and other precious gems. And that push broom? The stains on its handle are inlay of turquoise, among other semi-precious stones, and the bit of debris caught in its bristles are luscious pearls.

lora reynolds gallery

Collis' show is an ingenious pick to open a new gallery location. In a brilliant and thoughtful manner, Collis has upended our assumptions about how we assign value to objects (including art objects) and about the act of art-viewing itself. The simple stuff of work and manual labor, seemingly left behind in a slick urbane art gallery, demands that we look at it and look at it again. By deliberately using precious and semi-precious gems, metals and stones, Collis gives her art objects an instant market-based — and easily recognized — value.

And that's the point. We're wired to assign value to certain things, certain materials and certain actions. And we're increasingly wired to overlook what's hand-made, what's unique and what can't be seen at first glance.

Since the gallery's opening in 2005, Reynolds has consistently brought to Austin a refreshingly international and national lineup of contemporary art that's gently and warmly ironic, full of questions and loaded with relevance to our times.

Just make sure you look — and look twice.

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'Susan Collis: Why Did I Think This Was a Good Idea'

When: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays through Nov. 15

Where: Lora Reynolds Gallery, 360 Nueces St.

How much: Free

Information: 215-4965, www.lorareynolds.com