

Artist: Political satire exhibit

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Rodney Durso's "This is Only a Test" exhibit which displays political parody and satire through abstract works in mixed media, opened Thursday night at the Alfa Art Gallery in New Brunswick.

Alfa Art Gallery Director Vesselin Kourtev and his wife attended Durso's open studio in Chelsea, N.Y., in October, and after viewing his work, immediately began talking about doing a show at Alfa, Durso said.

Natalie Trainor, the curator of the exhibit and Rutgers College Class of 2008 alumnus, said "This is Only a Test" is a mini retrospective of the past three years.

His work is mostly collage and mixed media acrylic on canvas, and the exhibit is an eclectic, colorful mix, which shows how art can be experimental, Trainor said.

"He started in his early career as a graphic designer and you can see a lot of that influence in his work as a fine artist," Trainor said.

Durso said the materials he uses for his work include rollers, pencils, acrylic paint, pastels and paint pens.

Most of the ideas for his work come from his reactions to things he is exposed to in the world everyday, Durso said.

"A lot of the inspiration came from newspaper headlines that happened during the election cycle and also newspaper headlines with the economy downturn," Durso said.

One piece, titled "Robot Bird" from October 2007, is a 40-inch-by-60-inch collage on canvas with mixed media taken from the Wall Street Journal, Dwell magazine and Design Within Reach catalog, Trainor said.

The work depicts a robot bird formed from magazine and catalog cutouts climbing a power line. The text reads, "Newly published reports confirm his worst fear — Hillary [Clinton]'s front-runner status-sending robot bird."

Trainor said the piece is an example of contemporary political art and is a product of the 2008 presidential campaign.

"It takes you back to a specific point within the election where Clinton solidifies the front-runner role and you know this because he uses pieces of mass media such as the Wall Street Journal," Trainor said. "This was back when people within New York thought Hillary was the heir apparent to the Democrats."

Assistant director of the gallery Chris Kourtev said he found the political parody in Durso's work amusing.

"I think it's different from everything else so far," Kourtev said. "It's very modern. Every time I look at it I find something that I've missed last time, I find something new."

Durso's other pieces at the exhibit included a collection of about 50 small pieces he created last year over a course of three weeks so he could sell them as holiday gifts. He said the collection follows the theme "Art is Anything."

Durso said where he lives in Chelsea, he notices a lot of work he does not consider to be art.

"Sometimes it's almost ridiculous," Durso said. "How do you make that distinction between art and something that's ridiculous? Well I think if you can see the work somehow, you can see the effort it took. Even if it's bad effort."

Durso said in Chelsea, for example, a deli storefront from Korea was placed on a side street in the gallery district as an exhibit.

He said he does not consider this to be art, but just an interesting idea.

"My 'Art is Anything' concept is sort of making fun of that," Durso said.

The band Terminal Reynaldo, based in Jersey City, came to perform at the exhibit. Musician Justin Walker said they are a five-piece compositional indie rock band.

"You can hear a lot of our influences without any of them being obvious," Walker said.

"This is Only a Test" will be open at the gallery until Dec. 20.