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Sean Thomas Blott, Installation view: left, *Untitled Basketball Tower*, 2011, Mixed media, right, *Untitled Basketball Drawing*, 2011, Mixed media on paper, 50 x 68".

## Two Very Different Excursions into the Realm of Kitsch



Kale Van Leeuwen, *Woman in the City*.



Kale Van Leeuwen, *Gracefulness*.

**Beggar's Table Church & Gallery**  
**2009 Baltimore**  
**Kansas City**  
*Kale Van Leeuwen*  
 June 3 -30, 2011

**Leedy-Voulikos Art Center**  
**2012 Baltimore**  
**816-474-1919**  
*Sean Thomas Blott*  
**Kansas City**  
 June 3-July, 2011

By **BLAIR SCHULMAN**

Two artists showing across the street from one another in Kansas City share a connection to kitsch. One understands and appropriates it fully; while the other appears unaware of its value.

Kale Van Leeuwens', *•Silhouettes•*, is an over-abundance of painting over photographs at Beggars Table Church & Gallery. He starts with photographs edited in Photoshop. After printing, they're deconstructed, collaged and then painted. He adds a gloss coating as a finish. Silhouettes, both solid and outlined, are added on top of that. With so much process, it is remarkably without context.

Figures in motion and heads of varying sizes are superimposed over country scenes. The silhouettes do not seem to play any specific role beyond breaking up the landscapes. *•Sensuality and Exploration Smaller•* (both mixed media, 2011) are two examples of this confusion. Although they could be used for pharmaceutical advertising, it is difficult to construe their connection other than as a painterly exercise.

A second room is filled with large-scale nighttime urban postcards. The silhouettes he uses give a vague feeling that we're looking at title cards for a Cold War-era spy movie. *•Silhouette in Pink•* (mixed media, 2011) is one distracting piece that puts it on the level of camp. Without an underlying current of interest, they become tedious.

The painterly qualities he applies to these urban settings feel like something Gerhard Richter might appreciate. Blurring reality to find beauty in the ordinary with work that forms in structures, Van Leeuwen has the technical skills to really give his audience a shot in the arm. Perhaps unknowingly, he is the custodian of an enormous store of ideas in this body of work that I hope he considers figuring out and unearthing.

The other problem, secondary layering aside, is more apparent; there are just too many of these pieces. He might consider putting more time and effort into communicating a longer vision over a smaller output. Then his audience might be emotionally committed to looking at them beyond the assembly-line feel that is so omnipresent.

Like Andy Warhol and the Campbell soup can, Sean Thomas Blott looks to basketballs in making an eponymous alignment. It's easy to see the same culture-vulture-ing of iconography that Warhol once staked out and owned. There is also a laid-back Minimalist send-up similar to the color forms of Joe Bradley. In *Court Dialogue* at Leedy-Voulikos Art Center, his work shares something with both artists – a simplicity that creates an experience and not a moment.



Kale Van Leeuwen, *Exploration*.

Deceptively simple mixed media images on paper of basketballs are marked up with repair and construction tapes. Using paint, tape, graphite and ink, all are from 2011 and wood-framed. One curved piece, however, is placed over a wood pedestal that resembles the playing floor of a ball court. A small cut-out in the paper displays a video loop of a basketball in motion, tying together everything else in the room.

The basketball, says Blott, is a vehicle most in line with our culture. Very American, it's the symbol of a fast-paced spectator sport that is readily identifiable and offers a success filled with quick riches.

To complete his imagery, Blott uses all types and colors of tape — masking, plaster, construction and electrical. These tapes are applied throughout in a rainbow of pink, blue, yellow, red and green. Serving many purposes, they serve as a continuity of masculine objectification; when something is broken, the image most recalled is that of a man coming to fix it. Using these colors, Blott also shows a femininity that breaks down these sexist historical precedents, dissolving the once all-male bastions of success, both at home and on the court.

Blott takes control of the environment with his installation. He shows courage in taking this risk while keeping a long-term narrative. His use of a basketball is pure kitsch and a fragment of something bigger going on in our culture. It will be interesting for us to see how he continues to flesh it out.

Sean Thomas Blott, *Untitled Basketball Drawing*, 2011,  
Mixed media on paper, 50 x 68".

