

Capsule Art Reviews: "Colony Collapse," "Pastmodern," "Shambhala," "Unwoven Light"

By **Meredith Deliso** *Wednesday, May 15, 2013*

"Colony Collapse" [Nicola Parente](#) has a way of getting your attention. Four years ago, it was with giant mushrooms made of peat moss that sprouted from Art League Houston's patio. The piece, a collaboration with [Divya Murphy](#), was in response to a [New York Times](#) article that named Houston the worst recycler among 30 cities in the nation (mushrooms, you see, are natural recyclers). The Houston artist returns with another environmentally themed installation that is, to shamelessly use the pun, creating some buzz. In "Colony Collapse" at micro scope 1824, a boxed-in gallery space at Spring Street Studios, Parente lines the room with more than 2,700 (!) brown paper bags from ceiling to floor — a charming DIY beehive. Fittingly, there are no live bees in this makeshift hive, though the first thing you notice about "Colony Collapse" is the buzzing. It's incessant, and about the last thing you'd expect to hear inside the studio building. Parente has hooked you in. In addition to the sound of buzzing, a video projected onto one wall of the honeycomb captures a handful of bees at work — a memory of what once was. It's a potent message, the rest of the space notably, loudly empty. To further raise awareness to the issue of colony collapse, a pair of boards on the outside wall provide information on the crisis. Your interaction with the hive is disappointingly limited — as is the nature of the gallery, you can look into the space only through a window and a door. But you are invited to leave a comment on a yellow Post-it note and stick it to the gallery's door, in effect adding a new layer to the hive. Through May 31. 1824 Spring, 713-862-0082. — **MD**

"Pastmodern" The influences in [Russell Prince](#)'s collages intriguingly range from the Cubists and Dadaists to tattered billboards, old textbooks, and his great-grandmother's deteriorating Victorian home. Indeed, the Houston artist's works have an aged quality to them, from the musty old book covers of classics like [David Copperfield](#) that he rips from their binds to the highly distressed, unique frames that keep it all together. It's as if they've been around for decades, collecting dust in a musty study somewhere, rather than all having been crafted within the past three years. "Pastmodern," the name of the self-taught artist's current show at Front Gallery, is quite apt. There are nearly 40 collages for your perusal, scattered salon-style on two walls and arranged on the shelves near the front room's fireplace. Stamps, old paintings, book covers and other indiscernible scraps come together onto postcards and canvas boards of varying sizes. The show, put together in collaboration with guest curator [Jay Wehnert](#) of Intuitive Eye, nicely plays with this variation in size, the pieces getting progressively bigger and then smaller again as you move through the exhibit. As the name "Pastmodern" suggests, this is a serious exhibit that still doesn't take itself too seriously. In *Barrel of Monkeys*, the collage prominently features scraps of paper curved like the plastic monkey pieces in the children's game in an unexpected, charming reference. The best works are the smaller ones on postcard like *Barrel of Monkeys*, which gel despite their randomness. The bigger they get, the less control there is, and the proportions don't quite work at that size. Prince is a neighbor of Front Gallery owner [Sharon Engelstein](#), making this an extremely local show. It's also the artist's first solo

effort. His collages remind me of ones by another Houston artist who recently had his debut — designer [Jerry Jeanmard](#) — but without the lovely white space of Jeanmard's. Something must be in the water. Through June 1. 1412 [Bonnie Brae](#), 713-298-4750. —**MD**

"Shambhala" *Shambhala* is a Sanskrit word meaning a place of peace, happiness or tranquility. In the Buddhist tradition, it is paradise. It is also a meditation technique and, tellingly, the name of [Paul Fleming](#)'s latest exhibition at [Barbara Davis](#) Gallery. In "Shambhala," Fleming fills the gallery with bright, sleek color as he creates wall installations composed of identically shaped resin-filled objects arranged in straight lines and subtle patterns. The main body of work is *All my friends are here*, which takes over the first half of the gallery across every available surface. Repeating blocks of pigmented resin are arranged in single file across the walls like some broken code of color samples, available in every color of the crayon box. Other installations sprawl across the wall in a controlled chaos. *Fractured From the Fall* is a massive piece that strikes the back wall, straight strips of hydrocol and resin crossing each other like a broken rainbow. Other pieces aren't as neat and exact. In *Papillae*, red-tipped cones radiate from a center, while *Our Nature* features blue objects that climb up the wall and onto the ceiling, like ornate thumbtacks mapping population demographics or the spread of a disease. Still other pieces emphasize connectivity, with each part making up a tightly wound whole as in *These Subtle Agencies II*, a punishing square made up of countless blue, green and purple pieces arranged in a flowing pattern. Between these tight grids and the loose, pixelated wall installations, there can be a lot of white space, and it all makes for a somewhat sparse show. There's not too much going on here for deep contemplation, just a lot of eye candy. Through June 1. 4411 [Montrose](#), 713-520-9200. —**MD**

"Unwoven Light" Soo Sunny Park's installation at Rice Gallery is unapologetically pretty. It's a glistening, iridescent canopy of shimmering pinks, purples, blues, greens and yellows that resemble anything from a fish's scales to a spider's web wet with raindrops. Despite the apt comparisons, this creation is anything but organic. "Unwoven Light" is composed entirely of chain-link fence and coated [Plexiglas](#) that Park has exhaustingly shaped and welded together to create a network of abstract, bulbous shapes suspended from the ceiling. In fact, it took the artist and her assistants two weeks to make just one distinct unit — specifically, seven hours of welding to brace the fencing, 100 hours of tying the wire that holds each Plexiglas piece in place, and still more time cutting the Plexiglas shapes to fit into the chain-link cells. In all, there are 37 such units — 17 newly created for the installation and 20 recycled from a past work — that create patches of light throughout the gallery from floor to ceiling. However laborious its creation, "Unwoven Light" seems effortless, with light doing most of the work. Every step brings you a new combination of colors that reflect off the Plexiglas and bleed onto the walls and even the floor. There's no set path to follow, either, giving you the freedom to wander underneath and around the units in your own trance. There can be much to consider as you explore the work — about the properties of light and color, imposed boundaries and our perception of space — but it's also a pleasant experience that is, simply, joyful. Through August 30. 6100 Main, 713-348-6169. — **MD**