



Above: Chris Johanson, *Continuity*, 2009. Found wood, canvas, cast resin, paper, and acrylic paint, installation view. Below: Tadeo Muleiro, *El hijo, Bañera, and El Brujo*, 2008-09. Painted cloth, performance view.

DAVIDSON, NORTH CAROLINA

Chris Johanson

Van Every Smith Galleries
at Davidson College

West Coast artist Chris Johanson recently transformed the white cube of the Van Every Smith Galleries into a raw but whimsical environment of scrap wood, iconic stick figures, and richly painted surfaces. A self-taught painter who emerged out of the skate-punk "Mission School" of San Francisco in the mid-1990s, since his debut at the 2003 Whitney Biennial, Johanson has stepped out from the wall to create eco-friendly, participatory environments. *Continuity* re-made the optical space of painting into a tactile human space where discarded scraps of wood and paint can lids became enchanting characters and alluring destinations. The installation engaged time, human experience, and community.

In the first room, small painted wood figures gathered in formation atop a tilted platform of recycled panels of scrap wood painted a rich, golden brown. The figures were painted in assorted pastel colors and positioned before a circular vermilion gateway. Their asymmetrical arrangement and irregular repetition of color created an organic

rhythm that repeated throughout the installation. Each figure struck an identical variation of yoga's Tree Pose, which opens the hips, strengthens the spine, and improves mental concentration. Inspired by the recent loss of two relatives and a friend, Johanson recycled this pose from a previous installation because it celebrates "the natural rhythms of life and death." For him, *Continuity* speaks of peace with individual life and the lives of those around us. The installation was created with the help of participants in ART 945, a project of Charlotte's Urban Ministries, which provides materials and studio space to homeless people and gives them the opportunity to earn money from the sale of their work.

The figures on the platform were physically connected to the next room by golden-brown boards stretched end-to-end across the space. Like a rustic rainbow, these boards led viewers to exuberant panels painted with rough-hewn iconic images. Clumps of old paint from dried-up tubes made faces in relief, and an old paint can lid embedded in a tactile field of brilliant blue declared the word "self."

The expressive textures of these painted and constructed images asserted their "thingness." For Johanson, new materials seem wasteful, and used materials tell stories of human use over time. He found much of his wood while dumpster-diving on the Davidson campus. Portions of the installation were deliberately left unpainted as evidence of their former life and of his artistic process.

In the final room, Johanson literalized the visual push-pull of a Hans Hofmann painting into a maze of brightly colored panels. Like children on a playground, viewers felt their way through colored spaces. In Johanson's world, the space of painting opens literally into a physical, tactile environment and expands conceptually to include time, human experience, and community.

—Diana McClintock

