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**Boys of Summer - Painted, Drawn, Photographed - Bid Fond Adieu To Season**

by Joan Baum



"Ghost of a Flea" by Scott Treleaven

**Springs** - For The Fireplace Project's last show of 2008, "The Boys of Summer," curators Edsel Williams and Shelley Fox Aarons have mounted an "edgy" exhibition. "Eccentric" might be the better word, which gallery owner Williams would not mind. He prefers to call Fireplace, now in its third year, a "project space," one that reflects a specific plan and an innovative aesthetic. The building itself could be considered a project - a stripped-down remodeling of the old Talmage Garage that is faithful to history and functional simplicity.

The noun also yields a verb. Fireplace would "project" a mission, which is to "present" (as opposed to "represent") contemporary artists who evince a "non-traditional approach." Expect the unexpected at The Fireplace Project, you won't be disappointed. Even the idea of a catalog is turned around here - in addition to the 11 artists on display in "The Boys of Summer," a small "booklet" is on display ("I always do one a

year"), this one mimicking a back-to-school lined notebook, innocent lettering and all and containing reproductions of the art, and poetry, including the last stanza of Dylan Thomas's elegiac lyric, "I see the boys of summer in their ruin."



"Camp Fire After the Fish Fry" by Natalya Laskis

Indeed, in the front wood room, Jack Pierson's large pigment print, "Self Portrait (1/7)" strikingly carries

forth the theme. A golden boy of summer, his nude, taut torso posed against white berry blossoms and out of focus greenery, expresses a slightly troubled sense that "idealized youth and beauty" and must give way to "a darker season," as Williams puts it.

It's not all melancholy and longing for evanescent realms of gold, however, "The Boys of Summer" actually begins outside with an audacious, though not immediately apparent, visual - "Piss Rod" by Terence Koh, a 60 x 2 inch gold neon vertical that hangs from the front-yard oak tree. "It's what some boys do in summer," Williams mischievously proffers. No need to explain "The Last Boy of Summer", 2008, a digital photo frame and 43 black and white images looping in the main gallery, though the "boy," prancing about in a bikini and dramatic long scarf, seems to have already morphed into an older, theatrical butterfly, joyfully, defensively, attitudinal.

The ambivalence of dying summer is moodily captured by Paul P. in his well-painted, misty, somber-hued watercolors and oils of lone male figures, respectively, on a bed and beach, both media sets exemplifying what Paul P. described a couple of years ago as, "the spectrum of emotions present during male adolescence, especially when burgeoning masculinity is confronted with the often self-shattering presence of homosexuality." It's not clear what sources compel Jen DeNike's "Flag Boy" to keep submerging himself in water every two minutes on a single channel video, with sound, an American flag held aloft, but the effect is unsettling - a rippling pool, a golden California backdrop, an exhausted face - innocence drowning, boy and country? A political theme is more easily inferred from his "Surrender," nine chromogenic photographs of a youth signaling the title, in semaphore (words fail, as the country fails and fails in its promise to youth?).



"Flag Boy" by Jen DeNike

It's not all edge as outrage, or even all edge, or all boys, as Eric Fischl demonstrates in an oil on

chromecoat paper - two mature male figures, one looking down on sand, the other, a darker figure, nude, facing away, the sky is washed yellow, the subtext, overripe.

The season has clearly also turned in Natalya Laskis's three expressionistic oil paintings of a camp in rural Georgia, the atmospheric sunset glow in "Camp Fire After the Fish Fry" particularly reflecting a contemplative autumnal sadness. A sense of impending loss pervades as well the colorful work of Hernan Bas, two acrylic on linen over panel paintings that for all their rich-palette impasto, mysteriously suggest a idyll about to end (note the birch-looking pier in one).

Award-winning photographer Ryan McGinley, though, stays with the gold with his wide-angle "Coley" (check out that receding fence), a joyous C-print face mounted to plexi-glass (2/3) image from his "I Know Where the Summer Goes" series of friends and lovers, nude, young, sunlit (is this the other side of Wyeth's "Katrina's World"?). The picture nicely complements Collier Schorr's joyously sunny "Das Schloss (Horsti)" a transmouted Ektacolor print of a boy in a tree, his smooth upper body fragile against textured bark.

Others in the show whose relationship to boys and summer seem less obvious but whose work is eye-catching nonetheless include Anthony Goicolea with a Cindy Sherman-like piece, "Feral" (graphite, acrylic, mylar), a sure-handed drawing of a seated figure, in an elaborately woven sweater, holding a picture (of mom?) and surrounded by white cats who swirl around him. There are also several entries from multi-media artist Scott Treleaven, including a floor sculpture, "Ghost of a Flea", a Chiyogami paper assemblage of leather boots, thread, glue, zippers, and buckles formed into three overlapping bodies (no heads) - a piece as decoratively surreal as its Blakean forebear. There are also some knockout inks on paper, a dramatically lit black and white diptych, and an intriguing, symbolic ink and collage, in color.

- "The Boys of Summer" will remain on view through Sept. 30. The Fireplace Project is located at 851 Springs Fireplace Road.

Joan Baum lives in Springs and covers literature and the arts for print and radio.