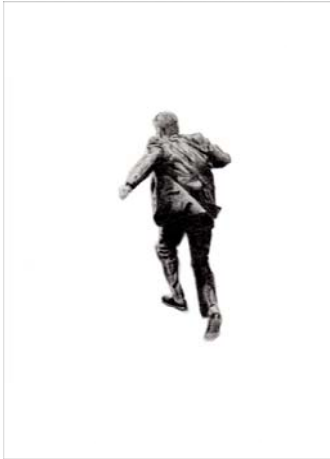


VISUAL ARTS

Quiet surfaces suggest complex undercurrents

By Debra Wolf
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The absence of shadow adds to the isolation and anonymity in Ben Roosevelt's series of small drawings, part of his Atlanta exhibit.

REVIEW

"Properties: New Works by Ben Roosevelt"

Through July 26. 10 a.m.— 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays.
Prices: \$50 -\$475. Swan Coach House Gallery, 3130 Slaton Dr.,
Atlanta. 404-266-2636; www.swancoachhouse.com.

Bottom line: Emerging artist Ben Roosevelt uses drawings, prints and installation works to guide us through a powerful and sophisticated portrayal of isolation and community.

A man in a rumpled suit runs to — or from — something unseen. Another man glances at his cellphone, unaware of what lies at his feet. A young woman fidgets, staring over her shoulder, reaching out one hand.

These are a few of the figures in Ben Roosevelt's series of lonely, mysterious drawings. He calls them "Reconnaissance Devices." Nearby are the artist's "Transmitters" — diminutive prints in orange on mottled, camel-colored paper. Empty swings, road kill, trash bins, an ATM machine — these, too, take on the stature of portraiture.

But it is "Properties," the installation of more than a thousand fragments of paprika-painted cardstock, that sets the framework for this impressive exhibition by the same name, currently on view at the Swan Coach House Gallery.

Winner of the Atlanta-based Forward Arts Foundation Emerging Artist Award, Roosevelt uses drawings, mixed-media works and arranged objects that he crafts, cuts and sets in formations, all to reinterpret the contemporary landscape.



In this portion of a large installation called "Properties," Roosevelt's fragments of brightly painted cardstock sprawl across three walls in a rhythmic interpretation of urban environments.

"Properties," with its sweep of overlapping angular dwellings, dominates the room. Its flecks of red crawl up walls and around windows like an expanding colony, an abstracted urban sprawl that meanders, thickens and then disperses. Continents and scatter graphs seem to appear in a meditation on populations, on discrete units and aggregates, their "properties" and interpretations.

While the drawings are delicate and the colors are chipper, Roosevelt's messages are anything but lighthearted. Human and constructed subjects — eloquently grouped into communities — reflect a solemn reality. We disregard our environment: trash, nature, each other. As the numbers increase, the problem worsens; humanity is diluted and our isolation intensified.

In less adept hands this complex vision would be hard to pull off. But Roosevelt is a talented guide through multi-faceted terrains and among unlikely soldiers. His guerrilla warriors are the lone street lamp, traffic cone, blank billboard and those of us who continue to chase, stand firm or reach out.