

VISUAL ARTS

Fun sorely lacking in 'Fun and Games'

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REVIEW

"Fun and Games: The Art of Ben Goldman"

Through July 25. 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Mondays-Fridays;
10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturdays.
Prices: \$850-\$2,000.
Callanwolde Fine Arts Center Gallery
980 Briarcliff Road, Atlanta.
404-872-5338; www.callanwolde.org.

Bottom line: In a clever premise using board games to examine cultural and social behaviors, Ben Goldman's mixed-media works are competent illustrations that nonetheless fall short of a full viewing experience.

In "Fun and Games" at Callanwolde gallery, Ben Goldman presents 17 mixed-media works that seek to explore the human condition. Showing his flair for design, the artist uses classic game boards both as surfaces to work on and inspiration to work from. It's a clever premise — with potential for a rich set of cultural, social and political observations.

In "The Hunger," Goldman depicts ravenous children alongside snarling wolves and wild boars — an obvious interpretation of man as beast. "Opiate for the Masses" takes a poke at the political arena and religious institutions, as quarreling adversaries spar across a Monopoly board.

Babies, toddlers, parents and apes angrily face off in "Modern Romance," while "Learned Behavior" riffs on the game of Trouble, with a dense design that includes a smoking chimp, boozing teenagers, a cocaine-sniffing woman and assorted drug-drenched figures over a bed of skulls.

But his promising concept and competent execution are undermined by a restricted range of emotions and behaviors. Even "America's Pastime," my favorite work in the show, is overly belligerent. A well-composed painting in greens, white and red (the flag figures as a central element), its scene caricatures America's win-at-all-cost attitude against a baseball backdrop.

Goldman is a talented illustrator. But ultimately his boards form a disappointing narrative. There is no balance here. And no subtlety — the human animal is rapacious, relationships are contentious, drugs are trouble, political and religious institutions hold a monopoly in our culture. We get it. The result is a show full of comic book shout-outs rather than cultural insights.

Couched in the context of fun and games, a more varied set of observations — and perhaps a sense of humor — could have provided a provocative and thoughtful viewing experience.



"America's Pastime" is one of the more effective works in this show, illustrating anger, violence and the competitive nature of our all-American institutions.