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Review: *Aerospacial* at the Herron

By Joseph Williams

Basile Gallery, Herron School of Art and Design

Through March 31, 2011



Darren Hostetter, *Spreading Democracy*, 2008, acrylic on aircraft aluminum, 28 3/8 x 27 1/4 inches

Curator Flounder Lee was once an aerospace engineer at the University of Alabama, before becoming an assistant professor of photography at Herron. According to Lee, he left aerospace engineering because it was too heavy on economics and not theoretical enough. The work of the three artists featured in *Aerospacial* reflects the curator's hot and cold relationship with aerospace engineering.

Sam Davis exhibits panoramic photos which depict astronauts acting like the Beat Generation: they wander around a moon-like desert with their helmets off, smoking cigarettes, lost, and looking up to the sky for their life purpose. One picture features an astronaut engaged in heavy petting in a seedy lounge.

McLean Fahnstock's video piece "Grande Finale" emphasizes the legacy of enduring images from the space program's launches. The title suggests a fireworks show. The video is a mosaic of all 134 shuttle launches occurring simultaneously, evoking a NASA control room. The launches appear almost identical, for Fahnstock has compiled the same angles and footage of each step in every shuttle's launch sequence. The Challenger launch stands out starkly.

Darren Hostetter departs from the space motif and presents paintings of bombers and drones arranged into snowflakes, kaleidoscope projections and textile patterns. In one work, a school of bomber-drones is seen swimming in the deep sea: to observe a robotic bombing machine given a place in the natural order of things makes for a jarring image. Interestingly, Hostetter makes the bombers from recycled aircraft aluminum.

One hesitates to call the show a loving memorial to aerospace engineering; instead it forces us to ponder its central purpose, its legacy and its place in the natural order.