

GALLERY FAKE: ICONOCONTEMPORARY

EILEEN BRAZIEL ART ADVISORS

54 1/2 EAST SAN FRANCISCO STREET, SUITE 7, SANTA FE

GALLERY FAKE IS A CATCHY AND CHARMING TITLE THAT MASKS A

disjointed show with a scattered agenda. By name alone, we might expect something akin to Meow Wolf's *OmegaMart* (2012), in which the collective stocked a fictitious grocery store, but Eileen Braziel Art Advisors's newest exhibition is a bit like the emperor's new clothes: needless pomp and circumstance. Whatever art world satire *Gallery Fake* claims to provoke, the show does not offer an imitation storefront with character gallerinas selling imaginary or otherwise bogus art. It's a regular hodgepodge in a very ordinary upstairs office. After weeding through Braziel's tangled strands of somewhat reflective, nearly witty curatorial statements, it's clear that she needs an interpreter and quality control. Despite good intentions the work is prey to a jumbled pretense with mostly good artists (and some not) stuck together for no coherent reason.

Braziel's thousand-square-foot downtown-office-turned-gallery is split into three modest rooms that could potentially display a lovely show, but unfortunately feel like exactly what they are: an art advisor's residual acquisitions with wall text in all the wrong places. Paragraphs and paragraphs of biographical information induce left-brain lethargy, while there are likewise too many pieces that are consequently poorly displayed. Is this a ruse to usurp the standard gallery model and shake up preconceptions? If you don't know which piece is by which artist, then you could possibly mistake a Robert Schwan for a Robert Rauschenberg, right?

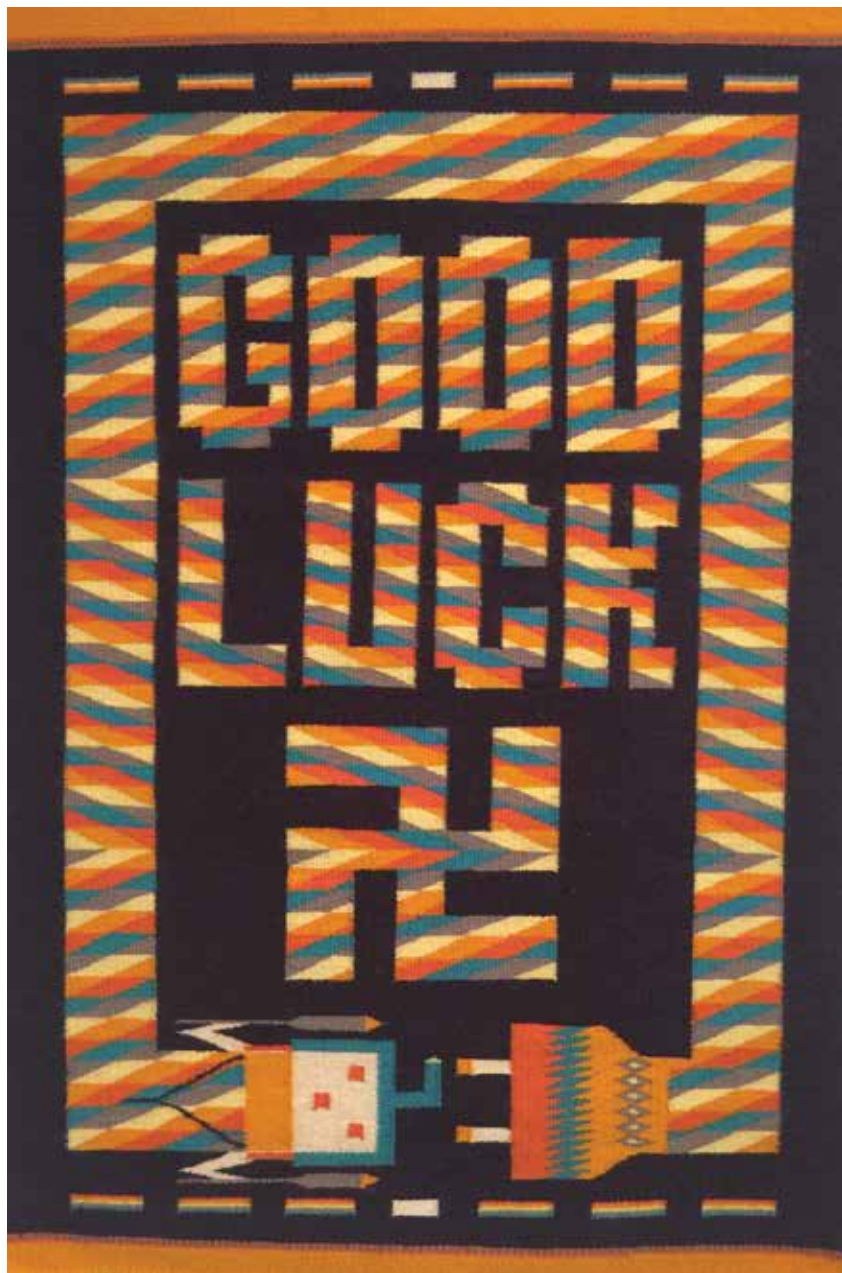
Sure, some of us would never know the difference, but for a well-informed curator inspired by Ai Weiwei's continual provocation of the status quo, Braziel could bring clarity to the uninformed instead of further muddying a perfectly fun medley. Even stressing historical ambiguity like her hero Ai did with his *Colored Vases* in SITE Santa Fe's 2013 *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness* show could offer a semblance of strategy. Were they Neolithic artifacts or reproductions? We will never know, but in *Gallery Fake*, we don't care. Braziel had the honor of visiting Ai's studio in Beijing and apparently returned home determined to be controversial.

While part of Braziel's intention is to "challenge the viewer about issues of artistic influence, authenticity, and historicity in the digital age" by pairing regional artists with internationally known artists, the only thing she did differently than Yares Art Projects, LewAllen Galleries, or any other space that affords wall space for local or lesser known artists via blue-chip sales, was to place two disparate artists' works side by side—almost. Examples might be photographers Will Wilson (b. 1969) and Karl Moon (b. 1879), father-son John and Duncan Chamberlain, or mother-daughter Lola and Melissa Cody. One artist's work does not challenge the other's art-historical validity or authenticity, but rather the more recent artist shows a plausible artistic influence—a perfectly natural evolution divorced from necessary definitions of subversion. Melissa Cody's woven evocation of the Navajo whirling log may be provocative, but Chamberlain junior's small aluminum sculptures prove that family legacy does not guarantee good work. Bert Benally's up-cycled life-size metal sculptures, like *Corn*, were finely rendered, humorous but bittersweet objects whose raw immediacy helped carry the show.

Gallery Fake combines three supposedly disparate artistic genres: iconoclastic art, Western art, and contemporary art. These distinctions are not mutually exclusive, and divvying up Western and contemporary undermines Braziel's intent to bring indigenous art under the contemporary umbrella. These categories lose integrity if some key, highly anticipated iconoclastic works are missing from the show. A photograph merely signals to Ed Ruscha's *FWY.FURY*. It is too bad Braziel couldn't show photographs of all the work and call it a show—it might speak more succinctly to her probing of historicity in the digital age. *Gallery Fake* is instead awkwardly creased between a then-and-now survey and a contemporary Native showcase that barely supports a more sobering conceptual framework.

Iconocontemporary, the show's coined subtitle, speaks to a potentially unified disparity that sounds pretty darned cool. Where one expects a fantastic clash of predefined artistic modes that undermine their own art historic validity and thereby initiate a new visual language, *Gallery Fake* remains a false idol.

—HANNAH HOEL



Melissa Cody, *Good Luck*, vegetable-dyed wool, 36" x 24", 2014