



Arts and Culture

Dare Devil Balancing Acts As Performed By...Pencils

By HOLLY MCDEDE on May 19, 2011 - 10:03am

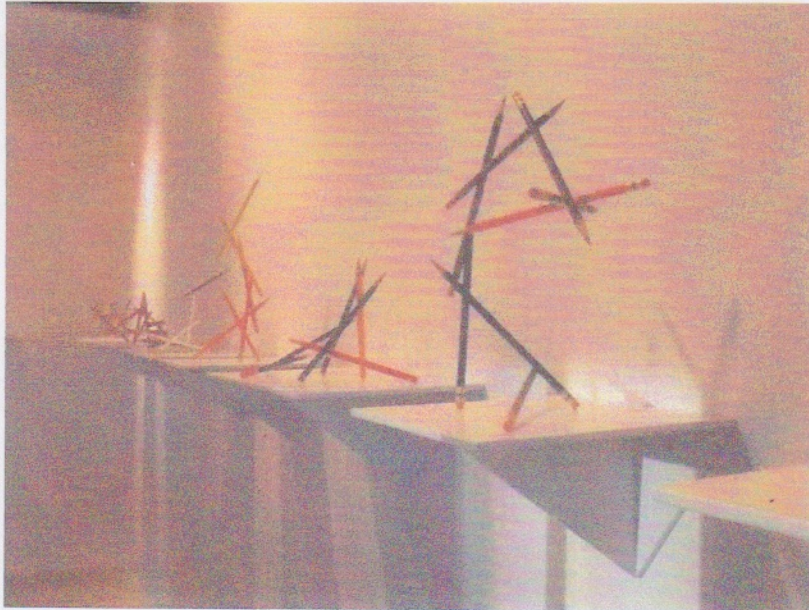


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Bay Area artist Bob Van Breda has crisply sharpened pencils in his eyes. Not in an "Excuse me, mister, but did you notice a pencil is stabbing you in the eye socket?" sort of way. No. Many of Breda's artistic visions just happen to involve creating pencil sculptures. As Breda says, "I don't go to bed dreaming about pencils or anything, but I do admit that I think about them a lot."

This certainly explains his new art exhibit, which is called Pencil Me In, which is being hosted at Electronic Works on 8th Street in San Francisco. Electronic Work's president Richard Lang says it was an easy sell.

"He talked about his interest in pencils," says Lang. "I thought, 'This is a guy who is really obsessed with pencils.' And then I thought, 'This is my kind of guy.'"

The exhibit features numerous pencil sculptures, all focused on what is called "the moment of inertia." This term means that at any moment the perfectly balanced pencils might fall down. Breda says, "It's what ballerinas do. It's what ice skaters basically do when they're spinning around. So basically the pencils are in a static state of movement." In one sculpture, a pencil dangles downward, as though it were saying to the other pencils, "I'm gonna jump!" Another pencil appears to be grabbing on to it, as though saying, "Don't do it! We're your friends." Other sculptures reminded me of balancing acts performed in circuses by acrobats – long, skinny acrobats who have been frozen and glued together by an artist named Bob Van Breda.

The display includes a room featuring Breda's pencil, pencil sharpener, mechanical pencil, and eraser collection. "I don't know why I started doing it," he said. "I have about 100 pencils. Old pencils. Over-sized pencils. Pencils that double as broomsticks, and bow and arrows, and hammers." One pencil case has a multiplication table on it. "We didn't have calculators," said Breda. "School used to be worse."

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And, there are also...giant pencils. These pencils are 25 times the size of an average pencil. And they're inscribed with emotions, which explains why this particular piece was entitled Attitude. There was Mellow Yellow, Angry Orange, Grumpy Green, and Greedy Green (Not to be confused with grumpy green). Each also had the word "Attitude" etched into it, or at least part of the word "Attitude." Some pencils had been sharpened, with the words disappearing into a point.

Most of the people in attendance were huge fans of the gallery. It's easy to see why. Lang says, "We show work we think is on the wild side of human behavior. We actually show wild life sometimes. We think artists are the last wild creatures on planet earth."

The pencil gallery will be showing until June 24th. So next time you're taking a Scantron test that requires pencils, and you think, "Seriously? Pencils are lame. Can't I use my iPad touch to take this test online?" take a trip to Electronic Works and experience the ancient allure of the pencil.

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