

Art review: ‘Residue’ at Ada Rose Gallery

Correction: An earlier version of the article incorrectly said that artist J.D. Hastings lives in Connecticut and artist Toni Tiller lives on the West Coast. Hastings is based in San Francisco and Tiller in Wilton, Conn. This version has been corrected.

By **Michael O’Sullivan** January 16, 2014

In art-making, as in household maintenance, the physical process of laying down masking tape and then pulling it up has consequences both intended and unintended. For the most part, the goal is neatly painted edges, though sometimes — as any do-it-yourselfer knows — the wet paint will bleed under the tape, leaving a line that is anything but clean. Occasionally, if you’re not careful enough, the adhesive also can lift off flakes of the surface underneath.

In the studio of an artist who isn’t obsessive-compulsive, those accidents tend to be happy ones. That fact is much in evidence in the lovely little exhibition “[Residue](#)” at the [Adah Rose Gallery](#).

The show features five artists, two of whom work as a team. Curator Brian Dupont, a Brooklyn-based artist and writer, found the show’s participants and their mutual love of tape through Twitter. He has organized a show that superficially focuses on process, but actually digs much deeper. The works in “Residue” are less connected by a common form, technique or means of mark-making than by a shared interest in such fertile themes as history, memory and the inevitability — and even the beauty of — loss.

Michael Callaghan’s work most strongly shows off tape’s straight-edge effect. That’s particularly evident in his series of small-panel paintings in which strips of tape have been buried beneath layers of white pigment as thick as cake frosting and then pulled up, like buried electrical cables, once the paint is dry. Callaghan’s excavations cut deep, canyonlike grooves into the surface of his art, creating mazes of meandering, Mondrian-like lines (in, say, pink and green) that crisscross his paintings’ skin, like scars.

Sharon Butler also lays down and lifts tape, yet her work and Callaghan’s are distant cousins. Inspired by a love of industrial structures, the artist creates sketchy, thinly painted washes that hover between representation and abstraction. Though boasting such mechanistic titles as “Tower Vents” and “Turbine Study,” Butler’s dreamlike renderings, which use tape to only suggest the roughest outlines of architectural forms, feel like bittersweet homages to urban decay, in a strangely unironic palette of pink and blue.

The other bodies of work in the show vie for the title of most attention-grabbing. Steven Charles's paintings might seem the obvious choice, if only for their eye-popping, psychedelic aesthetic, which screams, "Look at me!" from across the room.

Despite that, you'll want to get close. The intricate detail in his art, which features hard-edge tape lines, stencil-like patterns and almost microscopically small, hand-painted amoeboid shapes, coalesces into a kind of imaginative mindscape that you can appreciate best from three inches away. It's something you enter with your eye, figuratively speaking, rather than merely scan.

The collaborative work of J.D. Hastings and Toni Tiller involves an innovative combination of both masking tape and stitchery. Though generally less loud than Charles's work, it also commands detailed inspection.

The San Francisco-based Hastings is the taper of the pair; Tiller, in Connecticut, runs the sewing machine. They mail the pieces back and forth. The two artists engage in a process that is both additive and subtractive, alternately applying and removing both tape and paint from a work's surface, typically cutting up canvases and recombining them on the sewing machine into quilt-like patchworks that evoke both old-timey craft and contemporary abstract drawing.

They are remarkable and virtually impossible to capture in photographs.

Then again, this whole show is. Located in an unassuming and slightly cluttered-feeling space in Kensington's Antique Row, the Adah Rose Gallery looks nothing like most downtown art galleries. But as the artists in "Residue" demonstrate with sticky tape, you need not cling to convention to leave a mark.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORK

Prices for paintings in "Residue" vary widely. J.D. Hastings and Toni Tiller's smaller pieces — about the size of a magazine — run \$100 each, despite involving cross-country shipping in their creation. Though not significantly larger, Steven Charles's paintings typically sell in the mid-four figures.

The New York-based Charles, however, comes with a certain pedigree, having exhibited both at [Pierogi](#), the bastion of hipster cred in Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighborhood, and Chelsea's tony [Marlborough Gallery](#). His intricate work also is incredibly labor-intensive, taking weeks for a postage-stamp-size piece to two years for a large painting.

This is especially notable because the bespectacled artist is, by his own description, so nearsighted as to be legally blind. Corrective lenses help Charles's distance vision, but he removes them while painting, hunching mere inches

from the surface of his richly overwrought art.

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Born and raised in Washington, D.C., Michael O’Sullivan has worked since 1993 at The Washington Post, where he covers art, film and other forms of popular — and unpopular — culture.
