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Critic's Choice

Review: 'Canvas Panels: Part II' a clever answer to downsizing

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Necessity may be the mother of invention, especially when it's fueled by desperation. Humor helps, especially when it's devilish.

These elements come together in "Canvas Panels: Part II," Jonathon Hornedo's wickedly silly and wildly intelligent rendition of the downsizing that defines our times.

Earlier this year, Hornedo got laid off. Sales of his paintings produced zero income. So he began making inexpensive, high-quality canvas panels, which he sold to other artists, who did what artists usually do with primed and stretched canvases: paint them.

Hornedo learned a hard lesson: When it came to his art, paintings with no paint on them sold better than ones he had finished. So he cleared out his studio apartment, gave the newly christened gallery a ridiculously formal name and, for one week in July, mounted "Canvas Panels," an exhibition of 18 blank canvases. Sales were brisk.

That led to this month's "Canvas Panels: Part II." It consists of 11 small paintings by 11 of the artists who purchased panels last month.

Buying the panels out of an exhibition, rather than out of Hornedo's workshop, turned their purchasers into collectors, a role artists typically fill anyway, although they don't have the clout of professional collectors. In Hornedo's imagination, this fact also transformed him from a craftsman into a collaborator.

Here's how he puts it in the press release, which may not be a work of art but is far more interesting than most press releases (and many works of art): "For this show I am delegating the creative burden onto my collectors. I'm saying: why don't *you* make the ... paintings."

The managerial doublespeak that often glosses over the truth about downsizing takes pointed shape in Hornedo's project. His spunky piece of socially oriented Conceptual art replaces the disingenuous spin of corporate culture with underdog integrity.

The works by the 11 collector-artists run the gamut. Some are glib. Others are cheeky. Five stand for the way they embody an ethos of scrappy survivalism.

Karisa Morante and HK Zamani transform the cut-and-paste disruptiveness of 20th century collage into an emblem of 21st century anxiety about our capacity to follow through on promises, much less to sustain thought over anything like the long run. The illusionistic trickery in Andy Lee's and Tyler Waxman's abstract pictures makes you distrust your eyes and think twice about details.

John Mills' "Neo-Lithic" looks like Matisse might have made it, if he were a caveman. Like the show as a whole, its fractured forms hint at things bigger and stranger than immediately visible. Mills' all-thumbs approach also matches the attitude of Hornedo's project, which combines DIY independence and a-little-help-from-your-friends playfulness to create something unexpected.