

### The (Not So) Odd Couple

Collaboration is the soul of the Offices Saratoga

By **REBECCA SCHOENKOPF** *Thursday, Mar 10 2005*

*I Need This Now* by **Ali Smith** Sometimes two people—like Sonny and Cher or Donny and Marie—are greater together than they could ever be apart. But sometimes, like Nick and Jessica or you and your last boyfriend, a partnership means only atrophy, crabbiness and a bitter ennui.

Sometimes two people are less than the sum of their parts.

Such is the case for Megan Bogonovich and Ali Smith, whose collaborative drawing project "Saratoga Semblance" at the Office in Huntington Beach showcases the weakness of sharing one's work. Whether you're propping up (or dragging down) your group science project, participating in one of those awful bits of serial-magazine fiction (where one writer starts and everybody else adds on bit by bit), competing on *The Apprentice*, or playing guitar for Square before finally throwing your hands up in disgust and joining Maroon 5, you're tied down, always, by the weakest member of your team.

So who's dragging who? Who, to reach back to a particularly flogged-dead joke, is the weakest link? Well, it's not that simple. Bogonovich and Smith collaborated by mail, like a long-distance chess game back in the day, slipping their sheets of drawing paper into (presumably) manila envelopes and sending them cross-country to be enhanced by the other. The results are a sloppy mess, piled high on the Office's narrow walls.

And that is precisely their charm.

You can tell whose contributions are whose by looking at their solo stuff, also included in the show. Smith's paintings are big and defiantly ill-drawn, with mismatched, loopy strokes and violent colors. They're manifestations of the Id, of childishness, of naive primitivism. In one feral dreamscape, a ghost on a green cloud rises high over a village; it looks alarmingly like a schmoo. Lean and Vigorous is swirled green and pink like sherbet, with phallic lavender towers and road-flare orange slapped on. There are blotches that look like bubble-gum ice cream trees, a pickle, a small rotunda. There's nothing representational, but everything is ham-fistedly splotchy—and pleasingly so. Two paintings are beautiful: large-scale works glopped so thick with jeweled, scumbled pigment they must have taken a month to dry. *I Need This Now* is painted in pink and rose and crimson and crests elegantly at the top of her canvas, like the Parthenon or a wedding cake. Here, her colors jell and swirl, and her compositions are arched gracefully instead of looking, for the most part, like Mr. Potato Head, as happens more than once in her drawings.

Meanwhile, Bogonovich offers for her solo bit only two small statues—Suburban Front Yard Proposal #1 and 2—each delicate and exquisitely formed with an almost Martha Stewart level of anal retention. They're almost identical but for a small variation in size, and each is an object striated like a honeycomb, towering high and cactus-like over a small circle of individually molded blades of grass.

You might guess that there's tension between their styles. In fact, there's such tension it's surprising they haven't resorted to blows. You know, like David Gest and Liza Minnelli.

Ow!

Bogonovich paints or draws delicate Golden Age girls, all rosy cheeks and angelic moues. She draws horses. She shades and drafts and gives depth and dimension. Smith's portions of the drawings are pre-K circles and scumbled drips like Silly String or puffy-paint sweat shirts. Sometimes they're ovoid faces with stick-figure eyelashes or blocky, graceless monoliths like Wyoming's Devils Tower.

Many of the works are abstracted or completely nonrepresentational (although there is a lovely egg to which a sperm's been added), but sometimes the two get into a game of cat and mouse—in fact, in one, a mouse queen sits happily on her throne, while below her, peeking out from the corner of the page, is a cat that doesn't yet seem to know the mouse is there. Sometimes the two cover over each other's work like warring taggers.

There are an awful lot of works; they must have liked doing it. They seem happy. They may be half Odd Couple, Oscar and Felix at hammers and tongs. But in the best sense of partnership—think Double Fantasy—they're half John and Yoko, too.

Source: <http://www.ocweekly.com/2005-03-10/culture/the-not-so-odd-couple/full/>