

## Art

## I wanna rock

LaMontagne's vision for Boston art

BY GREG COOK

"TAYLOR DAVIS:  
N W R K A B T"SAMSON PROJECTS, 450 HARRISON AVE. BOSTON |  
THROUGH DECEMBER 13"THIS IS BOSTON,  
NOT LA"LAMONTAGNE GALLERY, 555 EAST SECOND ST,  
SOUTH BOSTON | THROUGH DECEMBER 27"BOSTON DOES  
BOSTON II"PROOF, 516 EAST SECOND ST, SOUTH BOSTON |  
THROUGH JANUARY 17

In 1982, a group of local hardcore punk bands released what would turn out to be a landmark compilation album, *This Is Boston, Not L.A.* The hardcore scene was very territorial, and the title of the album, taken from the Freeze song on the record, was seen as a challenge and an F-you to the prominence of Los Angeles and Washington hardcore, as well as a call to Bostonians to assert their own local (musical) identity. Now comes "This Is Boston, Not LA" at LaMontagne Gallery to take up that old title as a sort of manifesto of what Boston art can be.

There are three modus operandi that local artists bunch around today: deadpan set-up photos; new-media explorations; and rigorous conceptually driven installations, often with video of a performance. There are outliers, of course, and the visionary expressionist painting that began here in the '30s continues, and a cluster of lush decorative pattern painters is forming. But the photo, new-media, and installation folks are most prominent. And they weight the scene toward an aesthetic that's serious and angry.

Take the work of Bostonian Taylor Davis, who won the 2001 ICA Artist Prize and was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial. She comes out of classic hardcore Minimalism, making stuff like a wood-and-mirrors version of a typical shipping pallet. Her current show at Samson Projects, "N W r k A b t," offers esoteric sculpture on the edge between art and carpentry: an iron rod rising up from two crossed wood planks; a plywood screen; a beaver-gnawed log inside a spinable wood box; a log milled flat on two sides but otherwise left raw. It epitomizes



**BASKETBALL AND HARDCORE** Derek Aylward's Red Auerbach is one of the '80s-Celtics images at LaMontagne.

a certain branch of Boston art (the kind that, say, the ICA tends to reward): cold, rigorous, smart, dry, and (too often) kind of boring.

➤ The 22-artist line-up of "This Is Boston, Not LA" suggests a different Boston art (though note that a number of the artists are former Bostonians), a scene fueled by rock and roll and '80s nostalgia that includes Larry Bird's Celtics and the sort of murals you might have painted on the side of your tricked-out van back then. The big difference is attitude. It's a vision of a Boston scene that makes you want to throw up your hands and flash the devil's horns salute: yes!

Raising the show's banner is Samantha Moyer, who grew up in Boston but now lives in Brooklyn. She leans three stretched flags against one another to form a sort of teepee atop a California state flag laid on the floor. (Take that!) The three flags — a lobster with the slogan "Welcome," a Red Sox banner, and the Irish tricolor — represent the three-legged stool of (white) Boston identity.

Moyer's work fits into a national sculpture trend that's little seen here: scatter art (or, if you're snarky: scatter trash),

which draws on seemingly random assemblages of found objects. Other examples in the show include a white blob standing on steel rods and a wood plank by Miles Huston (grew up in Boston, now studying at Yale) and a bent-steel-and-Plexiglas thingamajig from Hyde Parkers Alexi Antonadis and Nico Stone.

The show also taps into Boston's illustration painting scene, whose sole local outlet tends to be Space 242 (thank you, curator Ami Bennett). Derek Aylward of Dedham offers catchy portraits of a cigar-puffing Red Auerbach and the mid-1980s Celtics line-up. His style is flat, loose, a bit painterly, with inspirations from mid-century modern and (it seems) Dana Schutz. Jonas Wood, who grew up in Boston but now lives in LA, contributes a similarly styled pencil drawing of Larry Bird.

Bostonian Cristi Rinklin impresses with a dreamy blue painting of sharply outlined smoke curls floating atop blurry water or clouds. Andrew Mowbray of Boston (Rinklin's husband), whose work fits into Boston's installation style, contributes a snazzy, typically well-crafted star quilt patched together from Tyvek sheeting.

Leading the rock side of things is Bostonian Joe Wardwell, whose painting *You'll Change* floats the lyrics "And this bird you'll never change" (from Lynyrd Skynyrd's ultimate rock anthem, "Free Bird," of course) in front of rosy mountains and green fields. From a series of rock-lyrics-floating-above-landscapes paintings he's been doing in the past couple of years, it's very close to Ed Ruscha's text paintings, but Wardwell replaces Ruscha's cool non sequiturs with cozy, schmaltzy Hudson River School-ish landscapes and the macho power chords of rock and roll (note the psychedelic lettering). It's sexy and silly, and probably the best work he's done.

Rebecca Gordon is a Boston native who ran Second Gallery here but now toils in art school in Chicago (please come back). Her installation *Rock, Pop, Classic* features a pair of black pennants (made from pieced-together black sweatshirts) hung

above a black stereo system (turned on, but silent) flanked by four black poles. The stereo rests on rolled-up black T-shirts. It feels like a powerful and vaguely eerie shrine to the music you listened to in your room at night as a teen.

Julia Hechtman, who arrived here from Chicago a bit over a year ago and now, with Kara Braciale, runs Proof Gallery in Second Gallery's old space, contributes a grid of 16 head shots of dudes playing air guitar in her studio. Their eyes are closed and their mouths are open in a hum or howl, as if they were in holy rock-and-roll ecstasy.

What makes "This Is Boston" so satisfying is the taste of owner Russell LaMontagne and director Emily Isenberg, their knack for snagging artists' best work, for providing just enough of a theme to hold the disparate pieces together (but not batter you over the head), and for play. Rather than early '80s hardcore, the show's mix of attitude, chops, and fun reminds me of the late-'80s Boston band the Pixies. Which is not a bad band to use as the lodestar for a movement.

➤ Down the street, Proof has its own round-up of local talent: "Boston Does Boston II." Bennett picked five Bostonians, who then chose five other locals to join them in the show. There are some overlaps with the LaMontagne show, such as another (but not quite as good) Wardwell rock-lyrics landscape. Mowbray presents a video that shows him standing atop a big lazy susan on a South Boston rooftop. He's strapped into a giant revolving-cup anemometer or holding a big windvane and spinning a bit in the wind. I wish the sculptures used in the performance were here, but even if they were, I'm not sure that Mowbray's subject (weather, in general) is enough to hold me.

Darren Foote fashions a table and desk lamp out of black walnut, with rods radiating from the lamp as if they were rays of light. The piece is exquisitely crafted, but the subject is a bit cutesy. In recent years, John Guthrie has made excellent, bright, hard-edged abstract paintings. I don't much care for his black-and-white watercolor here, which seems like a value-painting exercise combined with a Morris Louis abstraction. It's like much of the show: okay work with potential that makes me want to see where the artists will go next. ☉

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**AFTER BEFORE** Bostonians like Taylor Davis weight the scene toward an aesthetic that's serious and angry.