

Dzine brings street vitality to fine art

Margaret Hawkins

Graffiti artists begin as outlaws, imprinting public space as they please and acting on their own agendas. Even when they're drafted into the mainstream art world, their work tends to remain one of the purer forms of outsider art, uncorrupted by either academy or economy.

Chicago artist Dzine, whose installation is now on view at the Chicago Cultural Center, is one such artist, a self-taught painter who has made the unusual leap from street art to fine art but who retains the vitality, freedom and edginess of his former outsider status.

True to form, Dzine's current show is a funky combination of loosely applied wall painting, which creeps a bit onto the ceiling in at least one place, a few beautifully made objects and a musical element that is more than just background noise and which redefines space through a series of sensory equivalences with the artist's paintings and sets the mood for how the work is perceived.

And Dzine's ambitions are high. His intended effect seems to be a calming call for wholeness. Everything, from the bejeweled spinning turntable to the radial symmetry of a beaded flower-burst painting dead center on the back gallery wall, seems to return to a perfect circle and to encourage us, the viewers, to likewise focus and center ourselves.

Dzine: "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington; (312) 744-6630. Through Oct. 29.

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Jonas Dovydenas' black-and-white photographs of Lithuania, from between 1996 and 2002, were made five decades after the artist's family fled their native country in 1944, when Dovydenas was 5 years old. The photos document Lithuania in its second decade of independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but they also tell a more personal story. The photos seem wistful. Perhaps knowing the artist's biography makes us read sadness into his work, but there is a strong sense that the photographer, the eye on our side of the camera, is trying to enter back into a world that is familiar but finally foreign. What is most pleasing about the photos, the strong ethnicity of the broad Baltic faces and the sense of the subjects' tribal identity, is also what makes them seem exclusionary.

Jonas Dovydenas: "Another Country Also Mine." Chicago Cultural Center.
Through Oct. 22.

Margaret Hawkins is a local free-lance writer.

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