

ARTIST  PROFILE

AN ASKEW PERSPECTIVE

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

ALL THAT JAZZ isn't always just about music. Artist Tony Askew compares his own art collages to jazz improvisations he creates from objects he finds in the street, putting a new spin on an old tune. "I'm like a jazz musician," says the artist. "I put things together and see how they play off each other."

The current show at Art Resources represents Askew's recent work in collage, a medium that has allowed him to easily transition between creating in the studio and teaching in the classroom. Askew retired this year from over four decades of teaching art in high schools and colleges. Given his passion for teaching, his new reality won't set in until September when the students go back to school — and he stays home. "I've gotten a lot out of teaching," he shared. "I think I learn more from my students than they learn from me."

Each piece in the current show is like a quick, short story inviting the viewer to derive a narrative from Askew's compositions. Askew gets creative energy from the items he comes across. This particular show emphasizes images and paper items he's found that allow him to experiment with perspectives. The "things" he uses are objects he finds as he makes his way through the world. "Things just come to me," he noted. "I've got my family looking out for things, and sometimes I'll get an envelope full of things former students think I can use."

Askew tells about a box he found on a construction site full of old photographs and pieces of paper. "I have a whole history of this man in a box. He went to medical school and I've got his



Tony Askew



Stiff Drinks Stay Late, 10"x12" collage by Anthony Askew

notes on cadavers. It's fascinating." The man shows up in some of the collages and can be spotted wearing a college sweater with an 'F' embroidered on the front. "Collage is a playground for new connections in a land of endless possibilities," says the artist. "Letters, stamps, photos, and paper fragments become new treasures as they meet and become a new totality."

Askew is interested in the visual impact of the composition and shies away from imposing a narrative. Rather, he lets the items create a feeling of nostalgia and invites the viewer to make associations and meaning. "It's important to me that the viewer incorporates their own memories and meaning into the work," he explained. Cigarette packs, old game pieces, bits of measuring tape: these items tap into our collective unconscious, bringing into play our personal connections to a shared history.

Overall, Askew's collages have a child-like play about them like puzzles that have to be figured out; yet, there's an underlying pulse of time passing by. The items used have history and are undergoing aging, which Askew tries to slow down by adding a wax coating to the pieces. But the artist doesn't want to interfere with the aging process too much, as it adds detail and texture to the artwork.

For the viewer, it's fascinating to consider the individual journeys these objects have taken, from being disregarded and forgotten to finding new purpose in the form of art. Askew connects this journey to the creative process, which "encourages the artist to put control on happenstance or synchronicity." The leftover fragments of our everyday lives are plucked from obscurity and chaos and given a platform to tell their story, which, of course, is our story.



A Skew View, 10"x12" collage by Anthony Askew

Art Resources is located at 512 E. Haley St and is open Mo-Fr 9 to 3:30pm and Sa 10 to 2pm. There's an artist reception on Aug 9th from 5 to 7pm. For more information call 966-6923. Askew's work will be on display through Sept 13th.