

artUS



“STAYING ALIVE” by Eve Wood

Winslow Garage, Los Angeles CA

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“Staying Alive” (1983), we’re talking Bee Gees, was once the clarion call of a lost generation’s return to work after the party was well and truly over—first adumbrated in the hortological *Saturday Night Fever*. In the 1977 film (based on a 1976 *New York* magazine article, “Tribal Rites of the New Saturday Night,” written by Brit ex-pat Nik Cohn, who recently admitted he fabricated the story), Tony Manero, played by John Travolta, escapes his dead-end job and racial tensions in Brooklyn by dream visits to a local discotheque. A genuine “rave” long before these existed, Manero discos his way into a revamped Busby Berkley, depression-era fantasy, substituting strut and snap for dull workaday contortions.

At Winslow Garage, an alternative residential space in Silverlake, independent curator Mary Anna Pomonis has boarded the same soul train to sample the work of ten assorted artists who try to make art while working full time. “Staying Alive” unfolds by way of several fundamental questions. Can artists, despite the division of their time, achieve the necessary level of clarity to create a considered art practice? Does a solid work ethic essentially lead to a lively end result? Is this ethic even conducive to maintaining an ongoing commitment to one’s work?

A plethora of responses naturally ensues. Wendy Given’s drawing *Goose* (all work 2007) tackles the topic with typical humor, showing the animal’s neck ensnared in six-pack rings like an ostentatious string of pearls. Also tongue-in-cheek is Julie Zemel’s *I Wanted To Finish*, a preliminary sketch for her *Thing Thumb* sculpture that duly sits below it. Interior designer Kathleen Divney’s *Pat* painting disinvests it of its usual political charge and presents its sanitized remains as obsessively repeats a decorative fabric design. *Kino*, a three-minute video by German filmmaker Oliver Held, samples five hours of pedestrian traffic on the street outside a movie theater, as haunting a picture of distraction from work as ever existed.

Allison Stewart’s photographic series *Looking* focuses on the small, innocuous distractions that help to pass a typical workday—a stolen moment looking for keys, or a glance inside a handbag. Ryan Lamb approaches the issue of time management by “juggling video camera devices for experimental effect,” allowing fractured time to become its own unit of stability. Other artists such as Megan Geckler transform sculptural material—paint, paper, flagging tape, plaster—into elegant diversions. Sonia Madan’s untitled painting focuses on a highly patterned section of her dog’s coat of hair, and Eric Smail’s paper sculpture *Ned* is a natty reminder of Buckminster Fuller’s fantastical architectural experiments. Finally, Terence Hannum presents a handmade magazine, *The Future Belongs to Ghosts*, as well as record-sleeve paintings of some of the most influential musicians of our time.

Six years after *Saturday Night Fever* came *Staying Alive*, which *Entertainment Weekly* recently dubbed the “worst sequel ever.” This time, Manero has moved to Manhattan looking to break into modern dance productions on Broadway. He eventually lands a chorus role in *Satan’s Alley*, and after a series of romantic entanglements ends up replacing the male lead, cajoling his ex-girlfriend into accompanying him in his bid for fame. The final dance sequence, one of the most grotesque exercises in self-parody ever put on film, concludes where *Saturday Night Fever* began, with Manero leaving the stage door to reclaim the streets outside. Both an on-screen reaffirmation of street smarts and a real-life career downturn, it ensured Travolta’s descent into a decade-long slump. One can only hope that artists looking to rationalize their time might heed the same warning.