

# Miki Baird meditates on memory in exhibit at the Studios Inc.

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photography: E.G. Schempf

Miki Baird's "Read This ... Part Two" at Studios Exhibition Space is a meditation on death, trash and dissolution through the medium of shredded paper.

The exhibit, a sequel to "Read This" at Haw

Contemporary last November, builds on Baird's previous work and explorations with her deceased father's junk mail.

Entering the gallery, one is immediately struck by the enormous scale of Baird's works. "Chronicle 3" is a 30-foot pile of shredded junk mail, light in tone and perfectly shaped. At 4 feet wide, it's like an enormous hotdog covered in sawdust.

Another work, "... having been there," composed of brightly colored paper fragments frayed and layered like a shag rug, is 4 feet by 24 feet and hangs on a wall.

Glancing at the works, one sees 800 numbers, prices, advertising slogans, brand names and fragments of photographs and logos.

Apprehending the vast sea of incomplete information is like watching an old TV with a bad signal, its colors and images blending into static nonsense.

Before his death, Baird's father had begun hoarding junk mail, even sending away for flyers and information he didn't need. In a way, these enormous works of shredded junk

mail act as a metaphor for an aging brain, where information no longer connects properly, where memories fragment and disappear.

The exhibit's third work, "Question 7 #2," is also made from junk mail, but in this piece the mail has been cut up, photographed, reprinted and sometimes cut up again. The 8-foot-tall collage is arranged in a grid of repeating parts. Some sections are flat, while other sections are more three-dimensional.

Unlike the other two works, which feel highly chaotic and organic, "Question 7 #2" feels digital and organized. Yet it maintains the same feeling of dissolution and fragmentation, like a corrupted computer graphic with some mathematical disturbance in its code.

While the works are very large, the gallery at Studios is much larger. The cement floor of this converted warehouse still bears black tarry stains and cracks, now sealed in a clear covering. The ceilings reach well over 30 feet; entire walls of the gallery are left blank and the far corners are dimly lit, receding into shadow.

This is not a complaint. Rather, the vast emptiness of the gallery heightens the sense of death and dissolution around the artworks.

When a memory is lost, where does it go? Maybe our memories are merely covered over, like a forgotten country road overgrown with brush or an abandoned mine shaft that has caved in. Maybe our forgotten memories are truly gone forever, leaving no traces.

“Read This ... Part Two” is a somber meditation on death — on the inevitable end of our possessions, bodies and minds.

#### ON EXHIBIT

“Miki Baird: Read This ... Part Two” continues at Studios Exhibition Space, 1708 Campbell St., through Nov. 5. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Friday and noon to 4 p.m. Saturday. For more information, call 816-994-7134 (tel:816-994-7134) or go to TheStudioInc.org (<http://thestudiosinc.org/>)