



Canco conversion

High-tech works at former factory

Friday, June 22, 2007

By MARY BIRMINGHAM
JOURNAL CORRESPONDENT

The American Can Company building on Dey Street, once a symbol of Jersey City's industrial prosperity, is undergoing a transformation. Coalco, an international real estate development firm, is converting the million-square-foot factory into Canco Lofts, a condominium complex of more than 500 units.

Recognizing the appeal of Jersey City's flourishing arts scene, the developers wanted to connect with the local artistic community. Pro Arts, a nonprofit organization of visual arts professionals, is dedicated to promoting the arts in Jersey City and beyond. It was perhaps inevitable that these two forces would come together in a mutually beneficial relationship. Consequently, Canco Lofts will be the flagship location for this year's Pro Arts Jersey City Artists Studio Tour in October.

In the interim, Pro Arts has mounted a curated exhibition, "Works on Paper," on view through Aug. 31 in the lobby showroom. Kay Kenny, acting president of Pro Arts, selected three metropolitan area artists whose work she believed would complement the lobby space and form a cohesive exhibition. She chose wisely. There is more than meets the eye in these technically impressive works.

All three artists utilize computer software to manipulate forms and create complex hybridized art works. Their works are particularly well suited to the setting, a blend of industrial space and streamlined modern design.

Daryl-Ann Saunders assumes the role of "photographic architect," in her series of color subway photographs, "On the Platform." Their themes of construction and reconstruction take on a literal meaning in this rehabbed building. Utilizing both traditional and digital photographic methods, Saunders films deserted subway platforms at night, manipulates the images in Photoshop and assembles panoramic scenes. By flipping and repeating photographs, she literally multiplies the views, creating imagined spaces with new angles of vision. (See more at www.DASfineart.com)

Marianne Fourie, a resident of Hoboken, also finds inspiration and subject matter in the subway, a place filled with "collective fears and ordinary daily rituals." Her photomontages are highly abstracted pictures of pure motion, their blurred shapes and colors resembling the loose brushwork of gestural paintings. Using Photoshop, Fourie combines photographic fragments that exploit the natural distortions of the moving digital camera, creating the illusion of a simple snapshot. The artist produces "scenes that express states of mind, impressions, memories and emotions. "Certainty" and "Memory" are narrow vertical panels 80 inches high that look like columns of color and light. (See more at www.mariannefourie.com)

Although Bill Rybak's works have a photographic quality, he creates his prints from digitally constructed 3-D models. The images are "virtual" objects, existing only in cyberspace. Rybak, who maintains a studio in the Canco Lofts, constructs his designs in 3D Studio Max and finishes them in Adobe Photoshop. They are true hybrids, combining qualities of sculpture, drawing and photography. "Boardwalk I" looks like a giant diagram of a snail shell. In "Luminaries XI (c)" glowing illuminated orbs hang suspended like industrialized paper lanterns beside a metallic structure. (See more at www.billyrybak.com)

This exhibition is not the building's first encounter with contemporary art. Local residents may recall the recent public art project visible at night in the building's windows. Illuminated letters by artist Mary Ellen Carroll spelled the phrase "IT IS GREEN THINKS NATURE EVEN IN THE DARK," to raise awareness of global warming. Since early in the conversion process the developers have shown a willingness to integrate art and artists. Edward Yorukoff, director of marketing for Coalco New York, stresses his company's ongoing commitment to the arts. "We will continue our support of this important artists community and look forward to hosting future events that promote artists' work."