

Las Vegas Weekly

Fine Art

Badasses with heart

by [Danielle Kelly](#)

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Local art handlers show off their own work



"Caping" by JW Caldwell.

The art handlers who work for MCQ Fine Art are badass—according to the postcard for their group show. *The Difference Between Making a Living and Making a Killing* is hardcore, and there's even a skull and crossbones to prove it. Don't let the act fool you, though. They may look tough on the outside, but these bad boys have filled the walls of MCQ Fine Art's Downtown salon with delicately beautiful and—dare I say it?—*sensitive* artwork.

What, you may ask, is an art handler? Art handlers specialize in the moving, packing, unpacking and installation of fine art, and they are often artists themselves. Translation: These guys hang really heavy, really expensive art all day. It is a great way to support yourself until—to borrow a phrase—you make a killing with your own work. Avid followers of the local art scene already know that our fair city is home to numerous terrific artists, some more well-known than others. Many of them are art handlers, and several are in this modest show.

The exhibition is not without its problems: For a show by a company that—among other things—installs fine art, the installation of the work is surprisingly flawed, and the lighting is problematic. Compounding the experience is what at first appears to be a collection of throwaway works; to be honest, I wasn't sure how seriously these guys were taking the venture. A second visit was more revelatory. A number of these artists took this exhibition as an opportunity to try something new. The best work signifies a shift in direction or some form of experimentation for the individual artists.

Small and luscious, Chad Brown's "Blues for My Baby" marks a new direction. An excellent local painter, Brown is known for deft, richly painted, almost abstract interpretations of the urban landscape; in "Blues" he has applied this same sensibility to a very intimate subject matter. An immersion into the psychology of the piece doesn't hinge on knowing what the image is, and I'm certainly not telling. Suffice to say that the artist has taken a simple, close-up portrait and transformed it into a bittersweet psychological landscape of cascading blues and floating grays.

More

The Difference Between Making a Living and Making a Killing

Through August 29

MCQ Fine Art Salon, 620 S. 7th St. 366-9339

mcqfineart.com

[MCQ Gallery event information](#)

Following on the heels of a recent series of black, white and gray paintings, "Mom, I'm Home" marks a welcome return to color for Mark Brandvik. The artist's impeccably reductive enamel paintings of personal and public Las Vegas landmarks are always terrific, but they are truly set apart by his agility with color. In Brandvik's hands, a neutral white façade is transformed via pale blues, pinks and oranges into a portrait brimming with hope and promise. RC Wonderly, an artist who normally embraces a fierce minimalism, has somehow managed to be simultaneously spare and baroque. While previous explorations with OSB (oriented strand board) have been more restrained, the artist has clearly invested more research into the potential of the material. For "Untitled," he takes OSB inlaid with resin and sends it through a planer, revealing the panel's intricate layers of pressed wood shavings. The result is a highly decorative finish covered in delicate curlicues. Juxtaposed against clean crisscrossing lines of resin, the effect is one of high tension that rewards close inspection.

The biggest surprise is "Caping," by JW Caldwell. The artist usually works in acrylic, employing romantic Western imagery that caters to the idea of the Old West (bucking cowboys, wild horses, etc.). But here, Caldwell becomes more personal, and his audacity pays off. The unpretentiously scaled "Caping" depicts a modern-day "cowboy" skinning what looks to be a deer. The zinger is that the piece is lovingly detailed in watercolor. The depiction of such a violent, brutal and (one might argue) necessary act in so refined a medium as watercolor grants the image an almost touchingly tender familiarity and unmistakable respect. This combination of specificity in subject matter and subtlety of medium makes for richness in content that blows the artist's previous work out of the water.

Work by David Ryan, Aaron Sheppard and Evan Dent and a really terrific small painting by Neil Linssen round out the exhibition.

Making a Living reveals the soft and creamy center to the tough-guy exterior, and proves that art handlers need love, too.